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THE FERRETS



AFLOAT

SWAYING TO AND FRO, HELD EACH IN THE DEATH GRIP OF THE OTHER, THEY STILL FOUGHT ON.

OR,

Wizard Will's Last Case.

A Romance of Boy Detective Life.

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AUTHOR OF "FLORA, THE FLOWER GIRL,"
"WIZARD WILL'S STREET SCOUTS," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

FERRETS AFLOAT.

OFF the Virginia shore, the point of land washed upon one side by the waters of the Chesapeake Bay, and on the other by the broad Atlantic, a pretty yacht was gliding along near the hour of sunset.

With all sail set she was barely making a knot an hour, so light was the breeze, and each moment it seemed to be dying away.

It was a snug, pretty craft, schooner rig,

with lofty masts and long spars for her tonnage, and yet the hull appeared to be capable of good hard weather work, and of carrying a good spread of canvas in a blow.

She carried a United States flag at her peak, and at her fore was an odd little flag, for it was a white field, and upon it two hands, in black, grasping the ends of a chain, the latter in gold.

Upon her deck were about a dozen persons, attired in a uniform of blue jacket, white pants, and white duck cap.

At the helm sat the one who appeared to be the ruling spirit of the little vessel, and the only insignia of rank that he wore was a gold anchor and cord on his cap, and an anchor on either shoulder of his blue jacket.

A glance over the crew, from the captain down, showed that there was but one who had reached the years of manhood, and that one was a negro, with white apron and kitchen cap, who was busy about the caboose, a sufficient guarantee that he was the cook.

The remainder of those on board were youths, ranging in years from twelve to eighteen.

They were a bold-looking set of young fellows, with faces that showed they took life as it came, and would dare any danger they might be called upon to meet.

The one at the helm particularly possessed a strong face.

He was about sixteen, and yet the calm dignity and resolution in his dark, handsome face made him appear older.

Splendidly formed for one who had not yet reached man's estate, he had also the look of one who possessed strength above his years.

It was a face to win love, confidence and respect from young and old alike, and yet one to avoid if aroused.

"The wind is going to leave us, Foxey," he said, turning to a youth who sat near him and who was an oddity in his way.

He was the only one not in uniform among the boy crew, and wore a civilian's suit; something the worse for wear, and which had the appearance of having been wet through.

His face was bold, shrewd, full of mischief, and yet, strange combination that it was, with an intensely sad look in repose.

His eyes in repose were dreamy-looking, but full of fire the moment he spoke.

His form was slight, but wiry and full of sinew.

He looked like one who had "roughed it," young as he was, for he could hardly be more than fifteen, and one looking well into his face would have remarked:

"That is a boy with a history, and a strange one."

His coat being open revealed several badges upon his vest, on the left side, and they were the same as those worn under the jacket of the young captain, only the latter had five where the other had but three.

Where the jackets of the other boys were open it was observed that each one of them had a couple of badges like two of those worn by their leader and the comrade who sat near him.

The fact is, the yacht was the Sea Ferret, and her captain and crew were boy detectives belonging to a Secret Service League in the city of New York.

The youthful captain bore the name of Will Raymond, but his numerous exploits in a detective way had gained for him the title of Wizard Will, the Boy Ferret.

Will Raymond had accidentally drifted into Secret Service life, for he had been seen on the street one day by the captain of a band of burglars known as the Land Sharks, and resembling in a strange degree a boy who had been kidnapped, carried West, and, dying, had been buried on the prairies, he had been selected as the one to palm off on the sorrowing parents as their long-lost son, for years had passed since their boy had been stolen, and if he played his part well Will could readily pass for the dead child, and Elegant Ed, the captain of the gang of thieves, would get the enormous reward offered for the lost one.

But Will Raymond played into the hands of the Land Sharks until he could escape, and lead the police upon their den.

Though the criminals got away, their hiding-place was raided, and much booty was found.

With his mother and sister living with him in most humble quarters, Will had been glad to accept a position in the Secret Service, offered him by Captain Ryan Daly, a gallant police chief, who had taken a great fancy to the boy.

Of his past history Will Raymond only knew what his mother had told him.

A lovely, sad-faced woman—one who had evi-

dently been born a lady—from some cause Mrs. Raymond had come down in life to struggle for a living for herself, her brave boy Will, and his sister Pearl, a beautiful little child-woman of thirteen.

Mrs. Raymond had said that her husband was dead, and more she would not tell; but she never spoke unkindly of the father of her children, though it seemed that her marriage had been a most unhappy one.

One day, when on the verge of starvation almost, Will had met a gentleman who had just found a gold-piece which the boy had lost, and was going to spend for a Thanksgiving dinner, for it was their all.

From that day, in Colonel Richard Ivey, an ex-officer of the army, and bachelor of vast wealth, Will found a fast friend, and the sorrows and poverty of the Raymonds seemed at an end when Mrs. Raymond became Mrs. Ivey, and removed to her husband's elegant home.

A short season of joy followed, and then Mrs. Ivey took her children quietly with her, and left the home of her husband.

Why she did so she kept a secret from Will and Pearl, and she hid away in the city so that the colonel could not find her, while all the sunshine went from her face, and her lot seemed a most wretched one.

Once more in poverty they were, and then it was that Will Raymond entered the Secret Service as a Boy Detective, and organizing a band of young comrades he won fame for himself and them, and the services he rendered were acknowledged by all.

With good pay he made his mother and sister comfortable at a little cottage home in the country, and life seemed once more brightening for them.

The main aim of Wizard Will was to run to earth Elegant Ed and his band of Land Sharks, but, though four times he had found their den, and each time made valuable captures of booty, and discoveries of importance, the wily chief and his men had each time escaped him.

It was in chase of Elegant Ed, who had left New York on a special mission of devilry, in a yacht, that the Boy Detective's yacht, had gone, and Foxey, Will's right bower and lieutenant, had been kidnapped and carried off on the craft of the outlaws.

The vessel of Elegant Ed had, however, been run down at night by a steamer, and Wizard Will had found Foxey floating on a spar a few hours after, and from him, learning that all the rest on the craft had been lost, the Sea Ferret had put back for New York, and was cruising slowly along not far from the Virginia shores, where she is presented to the reader.

Now, Foxey, the one who wore a civilians' suit, and who was seated near Wizard Will, was an odd genius.

By other name than Foxey no one knew him, not even Will.

He had saved the life of little Pearl Raymond once, when she had fallen overboard from a steamer on the Sound; he had no home, and living in the village near which was the cottage of the Raymonds, he was known only as "Foxey the Waif," and "the Vagabond!"

Serving Will one night at a critical moment for the young detective officer, the two had from that moment become firm friends, and Foxey fairly idolized his comrade and captain.

In answer to Wizard Will's remark about the wind leaving them, Foxey glanced about them and replied:

"It's about gone, Cap'n Will, and we'll not get a breath again until sun-up, I'm thinking."

"I believe so too; so we will drop anchor, take in sail, and all get a good night's rest, which we need, after the rough weather we had last night," and Wizard Will gave his orders to take in sail, let fall the anchor and make all shipshape for the night.

In a few moments the yacht lay at rest upon the placid waters, while the crew, after a hearty supper, sought the rest they needed, and soon all was quiet on board, no one dreaming of a danger that threatened them with death.

CHAPTER II.

PHANTOM PIRATES.

IN an inlet on the coast of Virginia, the peninsula formed by the Chesapeake and Atlantic, a rude looking schooner was hiding away.

Her sides were browned from want of paint, her sails were blackened and patched, and her masts and spars were weather-worn.

Still there was a taut air about the craft, the sails fitted to perfection, and homely to the ordinary glance, there was yet that in the build and rig to indicate a stanch sea boat and one

that could sneak through the waters at a lively rate of speed.

She was a small schooner, not over thirty tons burden, and might be taken for a Baltimore oyster boat, or a coast fisherman.

She was moored in against the bank, a plank running from the deck to the shore, and the trees overhung her so as to almost hide her from view.

From her decks a good view could be obtained of the sea beyond the inlet, and a small vessel lay out upon the waters becalmed.

Upon the shore was a tent, and in front of it a log fire, about which were gathered half a dozen men, two of whom were busy preparing supper.

A couple of ducks were roasting over the fire, suspended by wires, some fish were broiling upon the coals, a large iron oven, full of biscuit was near, the lid being half off, for they were baked to the nicest degree.

In the ashes were some potatoes roasting, a huge coffeepot was sending forth its appetizing odor, and roasted oysters, raw onions and a jar of butter made up the supper of the vessel's crew.

A large crew, too, for a vessel so small, one would think, for besides the two negro cooks, and four men lolling about the fire, several others were lying at ease upon the deck of the craft, another was swinging in a hammock ashore, and two, followed by a couple of dogs, were just coming in from the woods, guns upon their shoulders, and strings of game swinging upon sticks.

All told there were thirteen men, bronze-faced, reckless looking fellows, with dogged determination upon their faces, and a wicked look in their eyes.

From the nets stretched out to dry, and the four boats attached to the little schooner, with oyster tongs and other implements of that nature, they would be looked upon as fishermen, while the game swinging in the trees, the numerous shotguns and rifles, and the two dogs belonging to them, gave the idea of a hunting-party.

"Mates, that yacht has dropped anchor, to keep from drifting, and she'll stay where she is until dawn, for there'll be no wind," said the man in the hammock, rising, throwing away his cigar and turning a glass upon the little craft out upon the sea.

"Some rich man's sea toy, I guesses," suggested another.

"Yes, and she'd be good picking for us, I shouldn't wonder," the first speaker returned, and he appeared to be the leader of the party.

"It's easy to find out, cap'n," another declared.

"It's risky."

"Maybe, but I'm thinking it's worth it."

"You mean that we should board her and bag her valuables?"

"I means jist that, cap'n, for she's a prize, I'm thinking, that would put gold in our pockets."

"It's very risky, Bob."

"Life is risky, cap'n, for we may die at any time."

"True; but what a row it would raise if we did."

"Who'd know it?"

"Why, it would get out."

"Not if we worked it right."

"Well, Bob, what is your idea?"

"The Sea Sneak's gettin' old, hain't she?" and the man glanced at their own vessel.

"Yes, she's played out, nearly, for her hull is rotten."

"We need a new boat, don't we?"

"Yes, badly."

"Yonder boat's a good one."

"She appears to be."

"A blind sailor could see that."

"Well?"

"We could take her, repaint her, change her rig so as to fool her builder even, clear out every article aboard that belongs to her, and refurnish her, and nobody'd be the wiser."

"We could do that, Bob; but about her crew?"

"Dead men tell no tales, cap'n," was the significant remark.

"You are right, Bob, and I for one am willing."

"Two of us thinks the same, cap'n, so call the turn on t'other lads," added Bob, who was mate of the vessel.

"What say you, lads, for you have heard Bob's suggestions?" and the captain turned to his men, all of whom had now gathered about him, drawn thither by the words of their comrade, for he had spoken so as to attract their attention.

"Them yachts generally go well stored," announced one.

"Their skipper often carries a big purse," another remarked.

"Jewelry and sich brings good prices, and fancy chaps like them yonder is, wears a fortin' sometimes," a third put in.

Other comments were made of a like kind, and Captain Crusoe—as his men called him, from the fact that he had for a long time dwelt alone upon an island upon the coast, like a hermit, and they knew him by no other appellation—was satisfied that there would be no dissenting voice to an attack upon the yacht, becalmed within two miles of them.

To further try their humor, he said:

"And the crew, lads?"

"Bob fixed that, cap'n, by saying dead folks don't tell what happened," a tall, beardless young fellow responded.

"So be it, lads, we will board the yacht to-night, and use steel, not lead, and by morning we'll have her in a new suit, so that no one will know her; while the Sea Sneak can hunt the bottom, that she can tell no tales."

"Is there many on board, cap'n?" asked one man, a little more cautious than the others.

"I don't think they outnumber us—and what if they do? as they will suspect no danger, doubtless be unarmed, and most of them asleep below, so we can have it all our own way."

"Now, mates, supper is ready, and after we have finished eating we can lay our plans to seize the yacht," and setting the example, Captain Crusoe at once began an attack upon the edibles, in which his men followed him with an eagerness that bespoke more appetite than conscience.

What they were believed to be—honest coast fishermen—they were not; for in reality they used the garb of toilers of the sea to hide their deeds of outlawry, as they spent their time in robbing unprotected homes along the coast, and were known as Plantation Pirates.

CHAPTER III.

FOXLEY'S SUSPICIONS.

"CAP'N BILLY, I don't half like this locality to be in," said Foxley, addressing Wizard Will, as the two sat together on the deck of the becalmed yacht, glancing shoreward.

It was after nightfall, the supper had been dispatched by the young sailors, the colored cook had spread himself down upon the deck to sleep, a coil of rope for a pillow, and a piece of canvas for a bed; and the boys had congregated forward and were singing songs, some of them possessing very sweet voices.

"Why not, Foxley?" asked Will, in answer to Foxley's remark.

"The fact is, Cap'n Billy, I knows this shore pretty well."

"You do, Foxley?"

"Fact, I does."

"How did you come to know about this coast, Foxley?" added Will with considerable interest, for he was anxious to know something about the youth who was so thoroughly unknown to all, as far as his past was concerned.

"Well, I was a cabin-boy once, on a coaster, and one night our vessel was boarded in a calm by Plantation Pirates, as they calls 'em hereabouts, and they made short work of our craft, after they took the cargo out."

"They set the crew afloat, in the yawl, exceptin' me, and they took me with 'em, and it was quite a long time afore I got away, and I don't want to take no chances with 'em ag'in."

"You say they are called Plantation Pirates, Foxley?"

"Yes, Cap'n Billy, for they robs the houses along the coast."

"Can't they be captured?"

"Lordy! nobody knows who they is, and the revenue cutter has often tried to find 'em out, but couldn't."

"You see there are a great many fishermen and oystermen along this coast, and they is honest fellows, so nobody suspects 'em."

"But these fellers play honest fishermen, but robs all the same all that they can find, and when they took me with 'em their retreat was about here somewhere, and they had an awful-looking old boat, but she could sail to win, and they was a bad lot."

"How did you get away?"

"They got so they trusted me, for I played it on 'em that it were the joy of my life to be with 'em, and one night a vessel was becalmed off hereabout where we is, and I know'd the pirates were going to board her, so I swam out and told the crew, and they up anchor and drifted off with the tide, and thus got away."

"The craft was bound for Cuba and landed

me there, and in time I made my way to New York."

"Well, Foxey, we must be on the alert, and not be caught napping by these pirates," said Will.

"That's my idea, and I'll keep my eyes open, you may be sart'in, Cap'n Billy, and I think it would be a good idee to tell the boys what we may expect, for my suspicions is that we'll get a visit from 'em."

"How many are there?"

"They'll come a dozen strong, you may be sure, and you'd better get our guns on deck so as to be ready."

"I'll do it at once, Foxey."

"Don't tell the boys I know aught about the pirates, Cap'n Billy, only say you has heard of 'em, and we may be attacked."

"I will, Foxey," and going forward Wizard Will informed his crew of the suspicions he had of danger threatening, and they at once got their arms in readiness for use at an instant's notice.

As the tide swept up the coast, the yacht lay broadside to the inlet, and Wizard Will thought it best to make a better protection for his crew, in case the pirates should fire on them, and ropes, spars, and a number of things were put along the bulwarks, so as to form a barrier against penetrating bullets.

Then the crew sought their places of rest for the night, while Wizard Will and Foxey remained on watch.

Midnight came, and not a breath of air stirred upon the waters.

"I guess your pirates are off on a cruise, Foxey," suggested Will, getting tired of watching and waiting.

"They'll be along now, if they come at all—Hal! see there, Cap'n Billy!"

As he spoke, Foxey pointed landward, and the eyes of the young captain fell upon three dark objects upon the waters.

"There are three boats, Foxey."

"Yes, they are the pirates, and one will go around and approach from the stern, and one on our starboard, as we now lie, for that's thar' game, to seem more'n there is."

"I'll call up the boys."

"Yes, for we'll soon have work ter do."

"Don't you notice how silent they come?"

"Yes."

"They has muffled oars."

"Well, we will soon break the silence," was the significant reply, and awakening his crew, Wizard Will soon had them at their posts, silent, determined and anxious for the ordeal.

CHAPTER IV.

A CLEVER CAPTURE.

As quiet as a grave was the little yacht, her crew, on the alert, seeming hardly to breathe, as they watched the coming boats.

For one of the boats it was hard work pulling, as they had to go against the swift-running tide, while another was coming across the current, and the third with it, the last having only to keep steady and come on without exertion.

Seeing the manner in which they were approaching, Wizard Will directed his crew to meet each boat, and with their Winchester rifles in hand the boys were ready for the fray.

Nearer and nearer the boats came, each one seemingly guiding its movements by the other, so as to approach together in the attack, and board at the same time.

"Boat ahoy!" suddenly hailed Wizard Will, in a voice that reached the occupants of each boat.

"Their watch is awake, but he sees but one boat," muttered Captain Crusoe, and he answered:

"Ahoy, the yacht!"

"Who are you, and what do you want?"

"An oyster boat, with fish, game, and oysters for sale."

"This is no time to board a vessel, so keep off," sternly responded Wizard Will.

"We want to see you, so we are coming aboard," called out Captain Crusoe.

"Keep off, or I will fire into you," Will responded.

"Fire away—we don't care," was the mocking response, and then in trumpet voice came the order:

"Pull men! all of you!"

With a cheer the men in the three boats now bent to their oars, but ere their voices had died away over the waters, came the command from the lips of Wizard Will:

"Fire!"

A dozen rifles flashed together, the roar seem-

ing like the report of a cannon, and instantly cries of alarm, groans and curses resounded from each boat.

The fire was wholly demoralizing, for in each boat was a dead man, and one or two wounded.

"Back to the shore, for we are defeated!" yelled Captain Crusoe, and there was great confusion in the attacking party, while the boat being borne toward the yacht by the tide was in a bad way, as two of the oarsmen lay in the bottom, one dead, another wounded, and the others were trying to stem the tide.

But they were now almost down upon the yacht, and Wizard Will shouted:

"Surrender, or I fire again!"

"Don't fire! we surrender!" came the response, in a frightened voice.

"All right! come along, quick!"

A moment more and the boat touched the side of the yacht, and in a minute after its five occupants were on the deck, one dead, another with a broken arm, and the remaining three terribly alarmed, for the tables had been turned upon them and the biters had been bitten.

"Cap'n Billy, just see ther! we is in luck!" cried Foxey.

"Well?"

"The wind is coming up lively, and we can catch yonder boats."

"Right you are, Foxey! All hands ahoy, to get up anchor and make sail," and Wizard Will's voice sent his crew flying to their posts.

"I fear we won't catch them, Cap'n Will, as we won't dare run in without a pilot after them," said one of the crew.

"I'll find a pilot; bring the man on deck who had charge of that boat," was the stern reply of the young captain.

He was at once led on deck, his wrists in irons.

"A heavily-bearded, hard-faced man he was, and he scowled savagely at his boy captor."

"My man, do you wish to save your life?"

"It hain't in no danger," was the sullen reply.

"Why?"

"We is honest fishermen, and we was coming out to serenade yer and sell yer fish, and you fired on us, so you'll have to suffer fer it."

"No, you are Plantation Pirates, and your vessel is the Sea Sneak, while you have a hiding-place in yonder inlet. You see I know you, and you'll hang as outlaws, so if you wish to save your neck, say so."

"How kin I?" eagerly asked the man, now thoroughly alarmed.

"By taking the tiller and running into the inlet after yonder boats."

"My mates would kill me."

"No fear of them, for I'll see that they do you no harm while I'll kill you if you don't."

"Chances are ag'in' me."

"They are, ninety-nine to one."

"How do I know you'll keep your word?"

"I am an officer of the law—see?" and Wizard Will threw open his coat, revealing his badges.

"Well, you wears ther metal, and I guesses I'll have to do it; but when do I go?"

"Just as soon as your vessel has been taken I'll let you ashore."

"It's a bargain."

"Now go to the helm, for the yacht is already moving."

"I can't work with irons on my wrists."

"True. Foxey, put irons on this man's ankles and then free his hands."

A muttered curse showed that the man had plotted jumping overboard when he got near shore.

"Now, my man, I like your company so well, I shall stand right here, and if the keel of this yacht touches bottom, I'll blow your brains out!"

The man saw that the youth meant all that he said, and he took the tiller with the air of one who knew his life depended upon it.

"I knows a leetle about this channel myself, and I'll keep my eye onto him, and jist post yer, Cap'n Billy, if I thinks he's going wrong," whispered Foxey.

The yacht was now under way, with mainsail, foresail and jib set, and she was gliding swiftly along in pursuit of the boats.

One of the boats was some distance from the other, and Wizard Will ordered the outlaw to head for the furthest one away, as it was in a position to first enter the inlet and escape.

"The other boat's got ther cap'n in it," said the outlaw, after a close look at the boats.

"You wish him taken, I see?"

"If he is, he hain't likely to harm me, while ef he escapes, and you let me go, I'm likely to suffer, for Cap'n Crusoe's a bad man to have for an enemy."

"Still I will hold on after the furthest boat,

for then I will prevent its crew from running off with the outlaw vessel."

"The old craft hain't worth much."

"It is worth a good deal to me, so head for the furthest boat."

The man obeyed sullenly, and, just as the boat reached the entrance to the inlet, the yacht came skimming along in its wake.

"Ho, that boat!" cried Wizard Will.

"What do you want?"

"Come to, or I'll fire into you, and then run you down."

Excitement was visible on board for a minute; still the boat held on.

"Quick! Come to, or take the consequences!" called out Will.

Instantly the boat swept around, and the rowers lay on their oars.

"Luff!" This was done, and as the schooner went up into the wind, Will called out:

"Come alongside!"

The boat at once moved to the side of the yacht.

"Make 'em go below, for I don't wish one to see what I is doing," whispered the outlaw pilot.

As they stepped on board they were ironed by the crew and hurried below, and their boat was anchored where it was, as the other had been, Will knowing he could pick them up afterward.

"Now for the cap'n's boat," the outlaw said.

"How many are on your vessel?"

"Two niggers."

"Foxey, take six in that boat and pull in chase of the outlaw captain, and head him off from the shore, for you can do so, while I will come to your aid, as soon as I capture the outlaw vessel," said Will, and Foxey and six comrades sprang into the boat and pulled rapidly away, while the yacht held on into the inlet.

"Now, my man, you hold your life and freedom in your own hands."

"A mistake will cause your instant death, while if you do as I demand, I set you ashore a free man," and Wizard Will stood by the side of the outlaw pilot, revolver in hand.

"I hain't goin' to commit suicide, young feller, you kin bet," was the reply, and the outlaw pilot devoted himself to his work, and soon ran the schooner in under the shadow of the overhanging trees, that bordered the inlet.

"Thar's the Sea Sneak, cap'n, and I have did my part," said the pilot, as under shortened sail the yacht slowly ran alongside of the pirate craft.

In an instant Will was on deck, followed by his comrades, and the vessel was taken, while, springing ashore, the outlaw camp was seized, the two negroes being found fast asleep in one of the tents, and their alarm when awakened was really ludicrous.

They were quickly ironed and sent down in the hold, and, with several boys on the captured vessel, to man her, the yacht put out to sea again, the prize following in her wake.

"Has you broken your word with me?" asked the outlaw pilot sullenly.

"No, you shall have a boat to go ashore in, as soon as we reach open water."

Once out of the inlet the man was put into the anchored boat, as the yacht passed near, and then the Sea Ferret ran down to pick up Foxey and his comrades.

They were found between the outlaw boat and the land, having headed the latter off, and the yacht soon picked them up and stood after the fugitives.

"We surrender," called out a voice, just as Wizard Will was about to hail.

"Ay ay! It is well for you."

"Run alongside as I luff."

The order was obeyed and these, like their comrades were seized and ironed as they stepped on deck.

"Where is your leader?" asked Will.

"He swims like a fish, so he slipped overboard and struck out for the shore," was the answer.

"When did he do this?"

"When he saw your boat cut us off from the shore."

"He will have a long swim of it."

"He'll make it, for he's half fish, we thinks."

"All right, I have his vessel and his men, so I am satisfied."

"Sail ho!" sung out Foxey.

All eyes were turned upon the strange vessel, coming rapidly toward them under steam.

"It is the revenue cutter," said one of the outlaws, who had been steadily looking at her.

"So much the better, for now I can get rid of my prize and its ugly crew," returned Wizard Will, and as the cutter drew near he went out

in a boat, boarded her, had a talk with her commander, and half an hour after the outlaw prisoners were on board the cruiser, their schooner in charge of a Government crew, and the detective's yacht was heading back to New York harbor.

CHAPTER V.

THE RETURN OF THE FERRETS.

"BACK again, my gallant Boy Wizard?"

The speaker was Captain Ryan Daly, one of the leading officers of the police force, and also a chief of Secret Service.

He sat in his private office at the — Police Station, busy in looking over letters, dispatches, and official documents, for he had just come in for his morning's work.

The one he addressed was Wizard Will, who had just landed from his yacht, which he had left at its accustomed anchorage in the East River.

The captain was a tall, well-built, manly fellow, with a face as full of earnest goodness as it was of daring and resolution, and he turned toward his young *protege* in a way that showed he was very much attached to him.

"Yes, sir, I am again at home," and Will grasped the outstretched hand.

"And what luck?"

"Good and bad, sir."

"As how?"

"Elegant Ed and his men cheated the galls."

"No!"

"Yes, sir, they were run down in their yacht, in the entrance to the Chesapeake, and all were lost."

"But Foxey was on board, you said?"

"Yes, sir; but we picked him up, floating on a piece of the bowsprit, and he told me the fate of the others."

"How was it?"

"They were caught in a sudden squall, and in the mist a steamer ran them down and then passed on, leaving them to their fate."

"Well, I am glad to know Elegant Ed, and the men with him, are out of the way, though I had hoped to bring that arch rascal to the galls."

"But I am delighted that Foxey has escaped."

"Yes, sir; and so am I, for I feared we would never see him alive again, after he was kidnapped from the shop of the Flower Girl by Elegant Ed."

"Did you discover anything of importance from Foxey regarding that pretty Flower Girl?"

"No, sir; nothing more than that her father is one of Elegant Ed's gang of Land Sharks, though she does not seem to be a criminal, or in league with them, other than knowing their whereabouts, and from what he overheard, Foxey is sure that the Land Sharks have left town."

"And the reason of Elegant Ed's cruise south is?"

"To get into his power some rich Maryland planter, whom he feared and meant to kill, and also rob."

"And did he discover that you had sent Foxey to the shop of the Flower Girl as a spy?"

"Foxey says that Elegant Ed was angry with the Flower Girl for taking a vagabond in to work for her, and placing so much confidence in him, and he was kidnapped, and the girl was robbed, to make her believe that he, Foxey, had stolen her money and jewels and then run off."

"Elegant Ed took Foxey to his quarters first, then sent him on board the yacht, intending to kill him, I guess, and I am very glad that, by raiding Elegant Ed's house I found out from his servants that he had sailed, and followed him in time to save poor Foxey."

"So am I, Will, for Foxey is a trump; but do you know anything about the strange boy?"

"A little, sir, for he saved our yacht."

"Indeed! and how?"

"We were becalmed off of the Virginia coast after leaving the Chesapeake, and Foxey told me we were near the haunt of a band of men known as Plantation Pirates."

"I have heard of them."

"He said a vessel he was cabin-boy on had been becalmed there and the pirates had taken her and he had been spared and made prisoner, but had after some time escaped."

"So he told me to be on the alert, and I got all ready to repel an attack and just in time."

"You were attacked, then?"

"Yes, sir," and Wizard Will told the whole story and the captain was deeply interested in what he heard.

"Now, Will, I can only say that, as is your wont, you have done nobly, and I am more than

ever pleased that I allowed you to form your Boys' Detective League, and we older ones must look to our laurels, with such wide-awake youngsters about as are you young ferrets; but let me tell you that there is more work for you to do."

"Well, sir, I am ready."

"I do not mean now, but as soon as you have returned from home, for you must go out and see your mother and sister, who have written twice to learn if I had heard of you."

"I shall go out by the noon train, sir, and not return until to-morrow, unless you wish me."

"No, stay longer, if you desire."

"But what is the work for me, Captain Daly?"

"Your Flower Girl has mysteriously disappeared!"

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes; the day after you sailed in chase of Elegant Ed and his yacht, I went by there and found the place closed."

"I could learn nothing about her, so took possession of the place, but could find no clew as to where she had gone."

"I discovered the secret tunnelway into the house of Elegant Ed, the panels in the wall, the false hallway and all; but I could find out nothing to give me an insight into what had become of the girl."

"Do you consider that she was kidnapped, sir?"

"I do not know."

"Were her things there?"

"The furniture was left apparently undisturbed, and the pots of flowers and vases remained as when she was there."

"I will try and find her, sir, and solve the mystery, and as delay may be dangerous for her, if she has been kidnapped, I will go on to the boys' quarters, whither the crew have gone, and put Foxey upon the trail."

"He'll nose out the mystery, if any one can," decided the chief.

And he accompanied Wizard Will to the secret quarters of the young detectives, which was hidden under the title of a "Boys' Lodging House," for the strength of the youthful ferrets was in their not being known as in the Secret Service.

Pleasant rooms, games to amuse them in their idle hours, a well-supplied kitchen and comfortable beds, made up the quarters of the Boy Ferrets, of whom Wizard Will was the leading spirit and chief, and Captain Daly was very proud of his young allies in discovering the criminals and crimes of the great metropolis.

Half an hour after the arrival of Captain Daly and Wizard Will, Foxey, his identity wholly concealed under a clever disguise, started forth upon the track of Flora, the Flower Girl, while the young captain took the train out to the village where dwelt his mother and sister.

CHAPTER VI.

THE UNKNOWN FLOWER GIRL.

MORE than that she called herself Flora, the Flower Girl, nothing was known of the beautiful creature who, one morning, was found behind the counter of a florist's shop, which had been previously presided over by a sullen-faced man.

Well situated, the shop had a good run of custom, and right glad had been the patrons when they discovered in the place of the surly keep a young and beautiful girl.

She had the air of a lady, dressed neatly, but with style, and arranged the flowers with a grace and celerity that was marvelous.

That there was a mystery behind all this, no ordinary person would have suspected.

And yet there was, and it was for the quick-witted Will Raymond to find it out.

He had been on the search for Elegant Ed, the chief of the Land Sharks, had seen a remarkable looking person come out of the flower store, followed by another, who appeared to be a clergyman, and, while the former drove off, Will had asked the latter who was the gentleman that he had been conversing with.

The answer was not satisfactory, and Will entered the florist's, to have another name given him.

That afternoon he had gone out home, to find there the clerical-looking individual, who he felt assured was a rascal and arrested him.

The man escaped, and in going to make what other discoveries he could at the florist's, Wizard Will had discovered Elegant Ed enter before him, and who was the supposed gentleman he had before made inquiries about.

To his surprise too, the florist was not there, but in his place Flora, the Flower Girl.

Cleverly leading her to believe he knew Ele-

gant Ed, he had been sent back into a rear room, and, though the outlaw escaped him, he had discovered that the way to the secret haunt of the Land Sharks was through the florist's shop and hot-house.

All these discoveries Wizard Will put to use, as best he could, but, being saved from assassination at the hands of Elegant Ed, by the Flower Girl, he protected her, and, to find out more, sent Foxey to her as a poor boy, to get a place.

Foxey's disappearance, more mystery, the sailing of Elegant Ed in the yacht, followed, and when Will returned from his chase, he found that Flora, the Flower Girl had gone.

But where?

No one knew.

Her shop was closed, yet apparently left as though she had gone out but a short while.

Her wardrobe had disappeared, but this would have been taken, had she been kidnapped, or gone off of her own will.

She had told Wizard Will that she was the daughter of one of the Land Sharks.

More he did not know about her, nor had Foxey been able to find out more during his stay there as her assistant.

That she had a good heart, and seemed not to be wicked, both Wizard Will and Foxey had decided, and neither could believe that she was in reality the daughter of a murderer and thief, as a Land Shark must naturally be, as no man could become one of that band of outlaws who had not taken human life, for this bond held them together more firmly, as the gallows confronted them.

In tracking Elegant Ed to his own luxurious quarters, Wizard Will had made the discovery that the outlaw had left open a secret panel, representing a large painting, and which hid a closet in the wall.

In this secret receptacle Elegant Ed had hidden away various treasures, the result of his robberies, and yet one thing, more than all others, had attracted the eye of the Boy Detective.

In spite of his carefulness, and living with his life in his hand, as it were, Elegant Ed had not noticed that he left his secret closet open.

He had slung the frame, which served as the door, back into place, but it had not caught firmly on the spring, and, when he closed the room door behind him with a bang, the painting swung open again, and thus Wizard Will found it.

The one thing that had attracted the attention of Wizard Will more than all else, was a leather bound book, with clasps of steel, representing handcuffs, and bearing the title:

"THE BOOK OF DOOM."

Upon opening it, Will discovered that its pages were not printed, but written, and a glance was sufficient to show him that he had made a most valuable find.

This book he had taken to the safe in the police station, to await his return, and when he went out home, the day of his return from his cruise, he took it with him to investigate its contents, for he was assured that it held secrets that would prove most useful to him.

While on the train he opened the book and glanced into it.

To his surprise it opened upon the the following, written in a fine business hand:

"Flora—*alias*—the Flower Girl. Claimed as the daughter of Red Fred Burke, member Number Nine of Land Shark League.

"Very pretty, well educated, a good ally of band, but no member.

"History wholly unknown, for she will not refer to past, nor will Red Fred speak of her as other than his daughter.

"*Note*—Her past life must be looked up, for she may prove dangerous."

"How strange that I should hit upon this item of Flora the Flower Girl in this Book of Doom," muttered Wizard Will, as he closed the book and left the car, for the train was slowing up for the station where he got off.

CHAPTER VII.

A FOREBODING OF EVIL.

"Oh, my son, my noble boy, I am so glad to see you home again, for I have had such a foreboding of evil of late.

"I am not superstitious, Will, but I have dreamed of trouble each night since you have been gone!"

"Indigestion, mother, that is all," said Wizard Will, as he threw himself into a chair to rest, having just come from the station.

His mother and sister had been taken by surprise, for they had not been expecting him in the middle of the day.

A lovely woman was Mrs. Raymond, but one upon whose beautiful face the sorrows and sufferings she had known had left their imprint.

It was a cosy home where they lived, and Pearl was the sunshine of her mother's life, for Will was much away, and his nature was rather reserved and dignified than joyous.

With two such children Mrs. Raymond should have been happy, even though her husband lay in his grave; but she carried a dread secret in her heart that cast its shadow ever upon her face.

She had fled from her happy home in Maryland one Christmas Eve, with a city man, whom the lover to whom she was pledged had saved from drowning and taken to her home.

The honest farmer, Kent Lomax, had been discarded for the fascinating city man, Schuyler Cluett, and she had left her happy home, her parents and her true lover to fly one night with the man whom she married, and who had, from the time of her flight with him until she heard that he had been killed in a railway accident out West, made her life utterly wretched.

She had never been near her old home, but she heard, long after, that her act had caused her mother's death, and she felt that she was a matricide.

From her children she had concealed this fact, and they only knew that their mother had once been rich, and their father had met his death in a railroad accident.

In spite of her pleasant home, given her by her son, boy though he was, and having about her every comfort, Mrs. Raymond felt that her life was fading away.

She always gave Will a warm welcome, and before her children forced a smile to her face; but she grieved in secret, and many a night never closed her eyes in slumber until nearly dawn.

It would come upon her in her working hours that some evil was crowding about her and those she loved.

When Will returned from his cruise in safety her spirits arose, and the mother and her children seemed happy, and enjoyed a long drive during the afternoon.

That night Will told of his cruise, the rescue of Foxey, the capture of the Plantation Pirates, and the disappearance of Flora the Flower Girl, and both Mrs. Raymond and Pearl were deeply interested in his adventures.

"What a strange girl that Flora is, Will," said Mrs. Raymond.

"Yes, mother, I cannot understand her; for, though she is a foil for the Land Sharks, she certainly is not wicked."

"And do you think she has run off or been kidnapped?"

"I do not know, mother; but I fear she has been kidnapped."

"Foxey is searching for her, you said, brother," said Pearl.

"Yes, Pearl."

"He'll find out," was the confident reply.

"Oh, yes; I'll wager that you will bet all your money on Foxey, Sis," Will returned, slyly, and Pearl blushed and drooped her eyes, for, next to her brother, Foxey, the Vagabond was her ideal of a boy hero.

Until a late hour the three chatted together, and then they retired.

But hardly had Will closed his eyes in sleep, when he was awakened by a wild shriek.

He knew that it was his mother's voice, and he dashed into her room, fearing some robber was in the house.

Pearl was awake, and holding her mother's head in her arms, Mrs. Raymond being unconscious.

Will quickly used restoratives, and after awhile Mrs. Raymond returned to consciousness.

"Has he gone?" she whispered.

"Mother, you had a bad dream, for no one was here," said Will.

"Oh, it was no dream, for I distinctly saw him in this room. 'See, the lamp is burning, for I never put it out at night, and I was not asleep."

"I had just left Pearl's room, for I sat by her side until she was asleep, and I had not been in bed five minutes when he entered the door there, from the parlor, and I gave a cry and fainted."

"Mother, you did not know it, but you had dropped off to sleep, and it was a bad dream."

"No, Will, it was no dream, for I saw him distinctly. See, I am awake now, and I know what I am saying."

"Whom did you see, mother?"

"Your father's spirit, Will!" was the startling response.

In spite of himself Will started, and Pearl

turned pale; but, confident now that his mother's mind was wandering, the boy said:

"I will take Pearl's room now, mother, and she can sleep with you, and my word for it you will see no more phantoms."

"Where does that cold air come from?" and Mrs. Raymond shuddered.

"The parlor door is open, mother."

"I closed it before I went to bed."

Will stepped to the door and found it ajar.

Then he passed on into the little parlor, for he felt the cool night air blowing in upon him, and he found the front door wide open.

This was an intense surprise, for he had himself bolted and locked that door.

"Mother did see some one; but who?" and as he spoke his eyes fell upon the hall window open the sash having been raised by the intruder.

Putting it down, Will returned to his room and finishing dressing, he went out into the yard to take a look about him.

The hall window was a small one, some six feet from the ground, and he had never been particular about fastening that at night.

He now observed that a rustic chair had been placed beneath it, and thus the intruder had entered.

A thorough search of the grounds and out-houses revealed nothing, and Will returned to the house to acquaint his mother with his discovery, for when she knew that it was a robber, she would feel less nervous.

"No! no! no! it was no robber," groaned Mrs. Raymond earnestly, and then she added:

"It was his face, his form, and I know his coming was a foreboding of evil," and nothing that Will and Pearl could say could change their mother's gloomy feelings and thoughts, and it was with great regret that the youth left her the following morning to go to his work in town, for he saw that she was still haunted with the dread of some dire trouble to come upon them.

CHAPTER VIII.

WRECKED.

It was a dark night upon the waters, and heavy clouds were skurrying across the skies, betokening a sudden squall, rather than a prolonged storm.

A small schooner was driving along under reefed sails, and heading into the waters of Chesapeake Bay from the Atlantic Ocean.

Suddenly there came several savage gusts of wind, the tops of the waves were blown into spray, and the squall had struck the waters.

For a few moments all was dark and misty, and the little schooner bounded like a thing of life, as though frightened at the waves that sought to engulf her.

A moment more and through the mist a large black object appeared, upon either side of which were two bright orbs that looked like huge eyes.

A wild cry of warning broke from the lookout on the little schooner, and loud rung his voice:

"Hard! hard down your helm!"

The order was obeyed, for the helmsman of the little craft now saw their danger; but, as the schooner began to obey her helm the huge black monster of the deep was upon her, over her, and then came a crash, the snapping of spars, shrieks, curses, groans, and, cutting the small craft in twain the destroyer passed on.

Not a sound was heard upon the large steamer, not a hail was answered, and, in the darkness and storm the fast sailing monster disappeared from sight.

The winds still lashed the sea to foam, the waves dashed high in air, and a few pieces of debris alone remained to show that a gallant little craft had gone to the bottom.

Suddenly, out of the waters into the air a boat shot upward.

It was a life-boat, and fast to the davits of the schooner, it had gone down with the wreck, until it had been wrenched loose and came to the surface.

Clinging to the boat was a human being, and he strove hard to clamber into it.

Near where it had arisen to the surface was a man, swimming for life, and battling against death.

He saw the life-boat, a cry escaped his lips, and he was soon alongside of it.

Seizing it, he drew himself over the gunwale, just as the poor wretch on the other side did the same.

Exhausted, they both dropped together into the bottom of the boat, neither able to speak, and there they lay, side by side, while the wind and waves drove the life-boat away from the fatal spot.

At last one of the two men arose to a sitting posture, and the other quickly did likewise.

There they sat, each glaring at the other in silence.

After some time one said:

"So you are saved, it seems?"

"And so are you?"

"Yes; but I had hoped that Satan, your patron saint, had not been so good to you."

"Why do you speak thus of me?"

"Because I know you as you are, and I may as well confess it now."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you have been playing a double part toward me."

"I do not understand you."

"I will quickly explain."

"Pray do so."

"You are one of my band of Land Sharks."

"Why need you tell me what I know?"

"When we were driven out of New York by that accursed Boy Detective you remember that our train met with an accident, and that one man, whom I had known in the past, and had come to dread, found me slightly injured, recognized me, and, believing me badly hurt, went for help, that he might nurse me back to life, and then—kill me?"

"I know all this."

"But I left, while he was gone for help, and he met you, and, believing your story that you were a detective, he told you my secret, and offered you a large sum to find me."

"You came to me in Philadelphia, and, holding my secret, forced me to make you lieutenant of my band."

"When I went back to New York, you, as leader of the Land Sharks robbed me, then sent for my foe, telling him you would place me in his power, and to do so, you got some of your old pals, who owned a yacht, to help you."

"I was to be taken to Norfolk, under pretense that you would give into my hands, for a consideration, Kent Lomax, my foe, and he was to meet the yacht there, you pretending to give me into his power, and permit me to be forced into fighting a duel with him."

"He was to pay you, and I was to pay you, and if he killed me, then I was to be robbed by you, and he was to be allowed to go free."

"If I killed him, then you were to have his money and valuables, and then you and your pals were to kill and rob me, and you would be chief then of the Land Sharks."

"This was your game, as I learned it from one of your pals, the skipper of the yacht, and I intended to have things my own way, for I had bought your allies to do as I said."

"But that accursed steamship ran us down, and, strange to say, both you and I are the only survivors."

"It is strange," admitted the man, whom he had accused of treachery; "and it seems fated that but one of us shall live. Which shall it be?"

"You mean to try conclusions now with me?"

"I do."

"Are you armed?"

"No."

"Nor am I."

"Then stand ready, for here in this open boat adrift at night upon the wind-lashed waters, we must fight our fight to the bitter end, for, wide as is this world, expanseless as is this sea, neither is large enough for both you and I to live in."

CHAPTER IX.

FOR LIFE.

At the words of his comrade, the man whom he addressed did not move or utter a word.

A short while before companions in crime, and each treacherous toward the other, each plotting the other's downfall, they had met wreck and death upon the high seas.

Then, as if by a miracle, each had been saved from a watery grave, while their vessel went down.

The same boat had been the refuge of both, and it was stanch enough to save them together.

But no, though they loved life singly, they preferred to risk death rather than feel that one must live, knowing that the other was also alive.

"Will you not wait until we land to settle this affair between us?" asked the man who had gone down with the boat and had clung to it through all.

"No, now is the time."

"We both may die, for we have no food, no oars, sails or means to help us to safety."

"Then one can do as much as two, and if I kill you, I shall not starve at least," was the significant reply.

The other shuddered, for well he understood the words of his enemy.

"So be it, if the struggle must come, I am ready, and let the suspense end."

It was dark, yet starlight, for the squall-clouds had drifted away.

Not an object was visible upon the vast expanse of waters, and sea and sky alone were to be seen.

The boat was tossing about on the waters, and facing each other, as they crouched in the bottom amidships, were the two men.

Their breath came hard, their eyes glared, and their forms quivered with hatred as they bided their time.

Suddenly the one who had forced the combat upon the other, stretched forth his hand, grasping at the neck of his foe.

The former was tall, slender, broad-shouldered and well built; the other was short, heavily built and muscular.

The longer arm of the taller man reached for the neck of his adversary, and yet before he could get his grip upon it, the other had seized his wrist in a grip of iron.

Instantly the battle began, and in strength, endurance and pluck the two men were well matched.

They dared not rise from the bottom of the boat, well knowing that they would go into the sea and both would surely drown.

They must fight there, as they then crouched in the boat.

They had no weapons, and endurance and brute force alone must kill one or the other.

A blow or two, then a fierce struggle; other blows, now reaching one body, then the other, and so the fight went on.

The larger man now and then reached the head and face of his adversary with his fist.

The smaller man could not reach the face of his foe, so could not punish him in that way.

So continued the battle for an hour, and each man sunk down, their grips unclasping, as by mutual consent, for they were utterly exhausted.

A quarter of an hour they remained thus, and once again the taller man began the fight.

Then they were at it again with the same fierceness as before.

For half an hour the fight went on, and then, feeling themselves growing exhausted once more, and getting desperate, as one man they arose to their feet.

Swaying to and fro, held each in the death-grip of the other, they still fought on, their blows growing weaker and weaker until suddenly their hands let go their hold; one of the combatants fell backward into the sea, while the other sunk down in the bottom of the life-boat.

For one the victory was won, and it was the taller of the two that had proven the victor.

It was long, a very long time before he could move even his head above the gunwale of the boat, and when he did day was breaking.

He saw that he was near land, for a long stretch of shore was not a quarter of a mile away.

A second glance revealed a small fishing-smack, standing down toward the life-boat to pick it up.

A moment after and he was on the deck of the smack.

He was sore from head to foot, his head ached terribly and his clothes were wet and torn with his struggle for life.

"Where am I?" he asked, as the half-dozen fishermen on the smack tenderly lifted him on board.

"Yonder is Fortress Monroe, and we are heading for Norfolk with a cargo of fish," was the reply of the skipper.

"I am safe, thank Heaven!"

"Who are you?"

"I am a yachtsman and my craft was run down in a squall last night by a large steamship that never stopped for us, and I alone was saved."

Such was the man's story, and after arriving at the wharf in Norfolk he said:

"I have no money, but keep the boat, as it is a good one, and I have a friend here who will aid me."

The honest fishermen offered him money, and at least to buy the boat from him at its value, but he replied, saying that his friend would supply him, and sending for a hack he entered it and drove away.

He had given a low order to the driver and the vehicle drew up in front of a shop in a dingy street.

Above the door hung three gilt balls, designating the nature of the shopman's business, and en-

tering the wrecked man found an old Jew behind the counter.

Taking from an inner pocket a wallet, he drew out some money that though wet was good, and said:

"Jew, I have been shipwrecked and I wish you to fit me out in a good suit of clothes and certain other articles that I will make known to you, and here is your pay."

"I can do it, mine fri'nt, so quick as never vas, for I has everyt'ings you vants," was the answer, and an hour after the man left the shop in a nice-fitting second-hand suit, hardly worn, however, before it had been pawned, and with a sachel in his hand.

Seeking a hotel he secured a room and sought breakfast and afterward much needed rest during the day; but at nightfall he took the north-bound train for Philadelphia.

Arriving there he went to the Continental Hotel, and late that night walked out, wending his way toward a very low part of the city.

As though thoroughly acquainted with the town he soon drew up at a door and gave a rap of a peculiar kind.

A panel in the door was opened and a voice asked:

"Who are you?"

"A Shark!" was the low response, and, as though satisfactory to the one within, the door swung open and the visitor entered a dimly lighted hallway.

But he walked rapidly along, ascended a rickety pair of stairs, and knocked five times at a door on the third floor.

The door opened part way, and a man's voice cried in a startled way.

"The cap'n!"

"Yes, Tiger; but you came near never seeing me again," and as he spoke the visitor strode into a large room where a score or more of men were grouped, listening to one of their number who seemed to be telling some strangely interesting story.

Upon the speaker the eyes of the visitor fell, and turning, he beheld the one who had just entered.

Then, from the lips of both broke a cry of horror and hatred commingled, for once more the two men who had had the death-struggle in the life boat were face to face.

CHAPTER X.

THE DUEL.

It was no wonder that the two men, who had so strangely met were horrified, at meeting each other. Each had deemed the other dead.

Half an hour before the short man had arrived at the secret retreat of the League of Land Sharks. His face was bruised and cut, his eyes bloodshot, and he moved as though with pain. He had entered the room where the band were assembled, and all were surprised to see their lieutenant battered up.

The man was not popular with the band, but he was a desperate fellow, and was greatly feared by the Sharks.

His name is Wolf—or rather, that is what the chief, Elegant Ed, called him, for it was his fancy to call his company a menagerie, and to name them after various wild beasts.

Secretly the Sharks were glad to see Lieutenant Wolf so apparently used up; but they were curious enough to ask.

"What is the matter?"

He told his story, and he was believed—how he had discovered a bitter foe of his chief, and knowing that he meant mischief against the captain, he had plotted to turn the tables upon him.

He had therefore told him, the enemy, that he would betray the captain into his hands, and to do this had invited him to go upon a yachting cruise.

The captain he had told of his plot, and in disguise he had gone along as a common sailor.

It was their intention when at sea, to throw this enemy overboard, after robbing him, and thus get rid of him.

They had sailed from New York, and were seeking the Atlantic, when at night a storm came on, and, in the darkness a large steamer had run them down, cutting their yacht in two.

It was when clinched in among the timbers that he had gotten so bruised and scarred.

But he had clung to the life-boat and had thus been saved, while all others had been drowned.

His life-boat had drifted with him near shore, in the darkness, when, standing up, he had lost his balance and fallen overboard.

To his joy he found he could touch bottom, and he waded to the shore, when he found he was near some habitations, for he saw lights.

Utterly exhausted however, he could not make his way there, and lay down upon the sand until morning when he found he was near the hotel not far from Fortress Monroe.

Dragging himself to the hotel he was kindly received and cared for, a purse was made up for him by the guests, although he had plenty of money with him, but he said he had lost it when the yacht went down.

With this money he took passage on the steamboat that night for Baltimore, and from there had taken the train for Philadelphia.

Such was his story, the only true part being that when he had fallen overboard he did find bottom, for the boat was in shallow water drifting near shore.

"Now, my men, Elegant Ed your captain being dead, and I holding the next rank to him, I am your chief."

Just as he had uttered these words it was, when the man he deemed dead, for he believed that he too had fallen overboard and gone at once to the bottom, entered the room to cast the lie in his teeth.

A shout of welcome went up from the men, at sight of their captain, and all eyes were turned upon Wolf.

Stepping toward him Elegant Ed said savagely:

"I deemed you dead, sir!"

"As I did you."

"You certainly fell overboard."

"Yes, in shallow water; but you?"

"Fell down exhausted in the bottom of the boat, after the struggle and am here to face you again."

"Do you mean to continue our quarrel?"

"We have no quarrel; it must be a struggle."

"Here we can get weapons, and as you claim to be a good swordsman select a weapon from our stock, as I will, and we can settle at once whether you or I shall rule here."

The men saw that Wolf had not told them the truth, and they at once called out:

"Yes, let the best man rule here!"

"I am content," said Wolf in a voice hoarse with passion, for he felt deeply the coming of his chief, and weapons were brought from an inner room.

"Men, whichever of us dies, be sure to carry the body at once to the cellar and bury it, for you must not be surprised with a dead man here," said Elegant Ed.

"We'll see to that, cap'n," answered Tiger, and then he, acting as second, put the two combatants in position.

Instantly the swords crossed, and the fight was begun in desperate earnestness; but, though Wolf was a clever swordsman, his movements were not as quick as his chief's, and in a short while Elegant Ed struck up his guard and drove his sword into his breast.

"With my last breath I curse you!" cried Wolf, as he fell heavily to the floor.

A light laugh broke from the lips of the outlaw leader, and then he said:

"Tiger, I leave you in command of the band in that man's place, for I have to go away on business. Be sure and get rid of the body. Good-night, men."

And leaving the room, Elegant Ed coolly wended his way back to his hotel, and leaving word at the office to be called for an early train, half an hour after he was serenely sleeping, as though no hideous brand of crime rested upon his conscience—crime so black that the tears of angels could not wash out the stain upon his wicked soul.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MIDNIGHT INTRUDER.

ALTHOUGH feeling wretchedly the next morning, after her alarm, and strangely nervous, Mrs. Raymond could not be persuaded to remain in bed, and so got up and breakfasted with her children.

After bidding his mother good-morning, Will went to the cabin of the old negress who, with her husband, lived near, and whom he employed to do the work of the place.

"Auntie, I wish you would keep about the house as much as possible to-day, for mother is not well," Will said.

"Yas, Missy Pearl done tell me how a robber man skeert her las' night, when I were gittin' breakfas' dis mornin'."

"Yes, and it has alarmed her; and I wish you would keep near her to-day, and tell Uncle Joe to do the same."

"I will, Massa Will, I'll do jist as you says," answered the good-hearted old soul, and Will felt greatly relieved to know that his mother would want for nothing.

Late that afternoon a telegram came from Will, and it read:

"Important duty will keep me in town to-night; but if you really need me I will come."

It was signed by Will Raymond, and the poor mother seemed to feel greatly the disappointment of not seeing her son.

After awhile she grew quite nervous, and said:

"Pearl, I feel so badly to-night that I wish you would put your things on and go into town after your brother."

"Let me telegraph, mother, for I do not wish to leave you," urged Pearl.

"No, for it is after office hours, and he might not get a telegram, while you could surely find him, and old Aunt Eliza will stay with me, so go at once and you can catch the next train."

Pearl was alarmed about her mother, and hastily put on her wrap and hat, and hastened away.

Aunt Eliza was up at her cabin, and Pearl went by to tell her to go at once to her mother and Uncle Joe drove her to the station to catch the train, and said he would await the return of herself and brother.

Aunt Eliza had her hands in some dough, for she was working hard, and she hastened to complete her task to go down to the cottage, a couple of hundred yards away, when suddenly a form stood in the door of her cabin.

She started, but, seeing that the visitor appeared to be a gentleman, she said politely:

"How-do, sah; is dere anything old Aunt 'Liza kin do for yer, sah?"

"I am a doctor, who has been sent out to see Mrs. Raymond, by her son, and I am anxious to get some medicine from the village, so must ask you to go and get it for me."

"Here is a ten-dollar bill, and you can keep the change."

"Lordy! you is a gemman, sure 'nuff, sah, an' I awful glad Massa Will done sent a city doctor out to see his ma, for de village doctor don't know much 'bout heart troubles and dat's what's de matter wid Mis' Raymond; but is you to stay, sah, until I gits back, for it will take me all of a hour, bein' as my old bones hain't so suple as dey was when I was a young gal."

"Yes, I will remain and keep Mrs. Raymond company, as I cannot catch a train back for several hours," and the doctor handed to the negress a slip of paper upon which was a memorandum of what he needed.

Old Aunt Eliza at once locked up the cabin and shuffled off on her errand, anxious to get back by dark, and the doctor wended his way down the path to the Raymond cottage.

He approached by the front piazza, and the door being open, he stepped within the hall.

Mrs. Raymond was in the little parlor, lying upon a lounge.

She heard the footsteps in the hall, and called out:

"Is that you, Aunt 'Liza?"

In response the man stepped into the room, and stood in full view of its occupant.

A cry, as of bodily pain and mental agony commingled, escaped from the woman's lips, and she staggered to her feet.

"You here?" she gasped, rather than said.

"Yes; and is this the welcome I receive from my dear wife?" was the reply, in a sneering tone.

"You were here last night?" she said, unheeding his question.

"I was, and your wild shriek drove me off, for I well know what that boy is when he is aroused."

"I pretended that I had seen your ghost, for your children believe you dead, and it is better so, for they look with honor upon their father, whom they believe to be in his grave; while, knowing you as you are, a criminal of the worst kind, they could but loathe and hate you, as I do."

"You draw a fine picture, but you did not believe me dead?"

"Oh, no; I had no such cheerful thought, for, after your visit to me at the home of Colonel Ivey, I knew you to be alive."

"I believe you knew me to be living when you married him."

"In your black heart you know that you speak falsely. You sent me word, by an ally, who lied for you, that you had been killed in a railroad accident in the West, and I believed it, and was content."

"Then you appeared to me, hoping to force me, through fear, to rob that noble man, Colonel Ivey."

"I fled from his home, but I left a note telling him all, for he knew of my past life, and how

bitterly I had suffered from my fascination for you, for it was not love."

"I fled from him and came here with my children, and here you have come."

"Oh, tell me why you are here, for do you not see that I am dying by inches?"

"Your beauty is fading, Ruby, I admit; but I am here to tell you that you must call that young hound off of my track, for I have a presentiment that, if I am to hang, he will send me to the gallows."

"Your son?"

"Yes."

"You know him then?"

"Oh, yes."

"And he?"

"Does not know me; as you said, he believed his father to be dead; but if you do not force him to give up the life of a detective, I will let him know all—yes, and my daughter, too."

"No, no! You would not do this?"

"Most certainly I will if you do not call him off."

"And deprive him of work, and let us starve."

"I don't care what you do, so you call him off of my track."

The woman swayed to and fro as though about to fall, and then she said hoarsely:

"Inhuman creature that you are, if the secret must be known, I will tell it, and I will be the one that brings you to the gallows."

With the spring of a tigress she was upon him, and desperation giving her strength, she clung to him with grasps that he could not unloose, could not shake off.

"Help! Eliza! help! help! help!"

Her voice rung out clear as a bugle, and the now thoroughly alarmed man tried to break her hold and dash away.

But in vain, for she would not release him, while louder and louder arose her cries for help, for she deemed Aunt 'Liza to be not far away.

"Let go your hold!" he shouted fiercely.

"I will not," was the firm response.

Instantly he drove his fist into her upturned face.

It half-stunned her, but still she held on, and pressing closer to him, he was unable to strike her.

"Let go, or I will kill you!" he shouted, in terror for his own life.

"Never, until you kill me!"

"And kill you I will."

"I do not fear you, and I will cling to you until help comes, and then you die on the gallows."

"Woman, you shall die, by Heaven! if you defy me!"

She laughed mockingly, yet still clung to him.

"Once more, will you release me?"

"No! help! help!" came the answer.

"Then die!"

As he spoke he reached behind him, and drawing a knife, held it up before her eyes.

"Strike, for it will but be the crowning act in your crime-stained life."

She spoke slowly and distinctly, and looked him squarely in the face as the blade was driven into her back.

With a groan the unfortunate woman let go her hold and sunk to the floor, while with a yell of terror the guilty man bounded toward the door.

There he paused and looked back, his face livid, his form quivering, and his hands outstretched.

"Ruby! Ruby!" burst from his pallid lips.

"Great God! have I killed her at last?"

He bounded out of the house, and, in the gathering shades of twilight ran toward the pier, where was a small cat-boat, with sail set.

Upon the deck of this little vessel he sprang, and, as he did so, the blood-stained knife dropped from his hand into the waters of the Sound.

With a curse he unfastened the painter, and shoving off from the dock, seized the tiller and headed toward New York, leaving behind him in the little cottage the victim whom his own hand had struck down.

CHAPTER XII.

TRACKED.

WHEN Foxey was put upon the track of the Flower Girl by Wizard Will, it seemed to be a herculean task, to find in the great metropolis one person who had mysteriously disappeared, whether by foul means, or through her own will.

Foxey was, however, not one to shrink from any task he had to perform.

He had gone, at the request of Wizard Will, and sought service in the employ of Flora, the

Flower Girl, and, as she had little dreamed that he was a detective, he had made a few important discoveries, before he had been kidnapped by Elegant Ed and taken on the cruise, which had so nearly ended fatally for him.

He made his start in finding the young girl, by going at once to her old shop; but, try as he might, he gained no clew there.

He questioned the policeman on the beat that went by the florist's, and the nearest neighbors, and yet he could only learn that the pretty Flower Girl had been seen one evening by several and the next morning she had been gone.

Foxey was in a quandary; but he was not discouraged, and he went to the Lodging House of the Boys' League for his supper.

After supper he started forth again, and was passing by the door of an up-town theater when he suddenly paused.

It was evident that some idea had suddenly flashed across the boy's mind.

"She used to have theatrical dresses, I remember, and she could dance like a fairy, and sing like a canary bird, too."

"Then I know she used to recite stage lines, and maybe she has took to the theater."

"It's but a suspicion, but here goes to find out!"

So saying he went up to the box-office, bought a ticket and entered.

"I'll go to every theater in town and see if she is on the stage," he muttered as he took his seat, which was a good one in the orchestra circle.

Looking over the programme he saw no name that he recognized, but then he muttered:

"I never knew her 'ceptin' by the name of Flora, the Flower Girl— Ah! here's a Flora Dale, and she sings and dances, and it reads of her:

"'Ther beautiful, young and talented,' etc.; but then that's what they say of all of 'em, even them as is ugly as sin and old enough to be my mother."

"But I'll see who this Miss Flora Dale is!"

In half an hour the person named on the bills appeared, and Foxey sprang to his feet with—

"It's my girl, by gosh!"

Seeing that he attracted the attention of those about him in his excitement, he quickly subsided, and then sat breathlessly listening to the young girl, as in an exquisite soprano she sung some operatic selection.

She was dressed with perfect taste, and she looked very beautiful; and Foxey was all of a tremor at having found the one he sought.

A spontaneous *encore* followed the song, and returning she sang a pretty ballad.

Again she was recalled, and Foxey started as suddenly she began upon a song that seemed to burn into his heart and brain.

"Lordy! oh lordy!" he said, as he sat trembling in his seat.

"Where did she get that song, I wonder?"

When she concluded the song the tears were in the boy's eyes, and seeing that he had again attracted attention to himself, he left his seat and the theater.

Going around to the stage entrance, he asked the attendant how long before Miss Flora Dale went home.

"She has just finished her song act, and will soon be out," was the answer.

So Foxey took his stand not far away in a doorway to watch for her coming.

Just then two men came around the corner, and Foxey heard one say, as if continuing a conversation:

"I tell yer ther gal gits a cool sixty dollars a week for her dancin' and singin', and she gets paid off to-night for the two weeks she's been at ther theater, and we might as well have it."

"I'm yer pard then, and she wears jewelry too, that sh'd be worth something," was the reply of the other.

"She does, and we'll make a good haul; but let us watch for her to come, and then run on to ther vacant lot near where she puts up, and nip her there."

"Is she sure to go that way?"

"Yas, for she has never missed."

"She takes the car to the street, and walks from whar she gits off."

"I'm yer man," and the two men, who had halted near Foxey, and had been watching the stage entrance to the theater, now walked on.

But they halted once more further on.

There they stood until a female form suddenly glided out of the stage entrance, and stood waiting for a car.

Instantly the men started off at a rapid pace, and Foxey gazed upon the one who was evidently their intended victim.

She wore a long circular, that completely en-

veloped her form, and a soft felt hat with a white plume was upon her head.

Soon the car drew up, and, as the young girl got on the rear platform, Foxey sprang on in front.

He glanced through the window, and though the one he was watching wore a veil, he saw that she was none other than Flora, the Flower Girl.

"So it is the Flower Girl these rascals intend to rob, is it?"

"We shall see," said Foxey in his quiet way.

CHAPTER XIII.

CATCHING A TARTAR.

WHEN Flora left the car, at the street which she wished to take to go home, she was surprised to hear her name called.

She started, turned, and beheld Foxey.

"Don't you know me, Miss Flora?"

"It is Foxey," cried the young girl in a tone of delight.

"Yes, Miss Flora, I am Foxey, and no mistake: but I hain't got no time to talk now, for I heard two men plan to rob you at the vacant lot, on your way home."

"They said you got paid sixty dollars a week, and had some jewelry too, and they watched to see you come out of the theater and then put off for the place, so I want your hat and circular, and won't you please look up a policeman and bring him here?"

Foxey had given the young girl no time to ask a question, and as she hesitated he added:

"I must have your hat and cloak, and you find the cop."

"But they may hurt you, Foxey, and—"

"I hain't afeerd o' bein' hurted, Miss Flora, and I must step lively, so do as I tells yer, please, afore they suspects suthin'."

"See, I is fixed," and Foxey displayed a revolver.

It was but the work of an instant for Flora to transfer her hat and circular to Foxey's head and back, and he certainly looked like a woman, as he hastened away, saying:

"Fetch a cop as quick as you kin, Miss Flora."

The girl, bare-headed and cloakless, darted away, while Foxey, at a brisk walk turned the corner and started up the street, a car having just drawn up to allow an old gentleman to alight.

The street was a dismal one, only here and there built up, and opposite some vacant lots, on the side that Foxey walked, was a row of dwellings just being built, so that it was a good spot for a bold deed of villainy, such as the two robbers proposed.

As he neared the vacant lots, Foxey saw the two men crouching down behind a pile of planks, and he knew that the moment for action had arrived.

As he drew nearer to them they arose and came toward him, and, just as they approached one said:

"Good-evening, Miss Dale; we are sent by the manager of the theater to see you."

They had approached so as to be able to grasp the supposed maiden upon either side; but to their utter amazement Foxey's right arm flew out, a dull blow followed, and one man dropped, while the boy covered the other with his revolver and said:

"Down on your knees, sir, or I'll bore a hole in your head!"

The man was taken wholly aback, and unnerved, he quickly obeyed.

"Now up with your hands, sir! there, that will do," and quick as a flash Foxey had handcuffs upon him.

"Who are you?" stammered the man.

"A wolf in sheep's clothing," replied Foxey, with a light laugh.

"You are not the girl?"

"No, I'm the boy."

"What do you want with me?"

"To jail you."

"I hain't done nothin'."

"No, I didn't give yer time."

"You has killed my pal."

"No, I hain't, I only stunned him a little, for I know just how hard to hit, and he's playin' possum."

"Come, Jake, git out of that and help me," said the ironed prisoner.

"Jake's name will be among the death notices in the papers if he tries it on," Foxey said.

"I've got money that says it's yourn if you lets us go."

"I've got lead that says it's yourn if you at-tempts to go," was Foxey's rejoinder.

"Who are you, boy?"

"I don't care to increase my circle o' acquaintances by tellin' yer, but here comes a gent whom I'll interdoce to yer," and Foxey pointed toward a policeman who was hurrying toward the spot.

A moment after he arrived, and said:

"A young lady told me I would find you here, and two thieves who intended to rob you, believin' you to be a girl."

"Yes; here are the gentlemen, and I heard them plotting to waylay Miss Flora Dale on her way home."

"So I borrowed her circular and hat, and here we are."

"And these men attacked you?"

"They intended to do so, but I was a little too previous for 'em."

"Is that man dead?" and the policeman pointed to the prostrate and motionless form of the man whom Foxey had felled with a blow of his revolver.

"No—scared," was the laconic response, and Foxey called out to the man:

"Come, get up, and let us see you!"

But the man did not move.

"Officer, he's kilt him, I knows, for Jake dropped as though he was dead."

"If I kilt him I'll fetch him to," and Foxey bent over and touched the man.

A yell of pain, a curse, and the man sprang to his feet, to be seized by the officer.

Foxey laughed and said:

"I tell yer a pin kin raise a heavy weight."

In spite of himself the officer laughed, and having placed handcuffs upon the other prisoner, he said to Foxey:

"You'll come along too?"

"No, I'll stay here."

"But you must come as a witness against these men."

"I'll be there, officer," and calling him aside Foxey whispered something to him.

"No! Well, I'm glad to meet you, for I've heard much of you boys," was the reply.

"I'll be on hand in the morning, officer; but where is the young lady?" asked Foxey.

"She said she would follow me."

"But she hasn't, and I'll look her up, for I have her hat and circular," and Foxey walked off in the direction he had come, while the policeman led the prisoners the opposite way to the station.

But in vain was it that Foxey searched for Flora, the Flower Girl, for she could nowhere be found!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

NEVER in his life had Foxey been so non-plused, as he was at not finding Flora, the Flower Girl, at the corner as he had expected.

What could have become of her he could not, for the life of him, imagine.

Had she purposely run away from him?

He was aware, from what Wizard Will had told him, that she knew him to be a detective, and had been while in her employ.

Her delight at seeing him, he argued, was at knowing that he had not been foully dealt with by Elegant Ed, who she knew had taken him with him upon the yacht.

Then, remembering that he was a detective, and not wishing him to know of her dwelling-place, she had fled from him, after sending the officer to her aid.

"But can this be the reason, I wonder?"

"Hardly, for she must know I can find her out at the theater."

"I will go there to-morrow and see what they can tell me about her; but now to go to the lodging-house, and get out of this female bonnet and cloak."

"Gosh! She's got my hat; but it's worth about ten cents a dozen, while her hat and cloak is very valuable."

"I'll have to tie my head up in a handkerchief."

So saying, Foxey tied his handkerchief about his head, and wrapping the hat in the cloak, he started for his retreat in the lower part of the city.

He was certainly a suspicious-looking person, hatless, and with a large bundle under his arm, and several times he was "picked up" by the faithful guardians of the city's peace.

But showing his insignia of office got him free, and at last he arrived at the young ferrets' quarters, and found most of his comrades already in bed.

To those who were up he told his story, and yet not one of them could solve the mysterious disappearance of Flora, the Flower Girl.

"You kin find out in the morning, at the

theater," said one, and with this in view as a consolation, Foxey sought his cot and was soon fast asleep.

He was up betimes, and having had his breakfast, as Wizard Will had not come in town, he sought Captain Daly and made known his discovery of Flora, the Flower Girl, and her disappearance, at the same time showing the hat and circular.

"I will go to the court with you, Foxey, for you to appear against those two scoundrels, and by that time Will will arrive, and you can go together to the theater to find out about this strange Flower Girl," and Captain Daly accompanied Foxey to the Police Court, where the two highwaymen were to be brought up for examination.

Captain Daly's presence with Foxey got him recognition by the Court, and he told his story of what he had heard the two men say, and how he had gone up-town on the same car with the Flower Girl, joined her, got her to let him have her cloak and hat and then the approach of the two men.

His Honor listened attentively to the story, Captain Daly vouched for the young detective, and, as the two men were old offenders, they were made short work of and sent off to jail.

As Foxey was leaving the Police Court with Captain Daly, Wizard Will joined them, for word had been left for him where to come.

Will had just come in from home, and he told Captain Daly and Foxey of the midnight intruder into the cottage, who had so alarmed his mother, and he added:

"I shall try and entrap him to-night, for it must be some one who knows all about our movements, so I will telegraph mother that I cannot come out, and he may thus make another visit, while I will go out on a train after dark with some of my boys, and lay in wait for the rascal."

"Always ready with a good plan in that shrewd head of yours, Will, and I hope you may catch the scamp, whoever he is; but what are you going to do about this mysterious Flower Girl?"

"I will go to the theater with Foxey and see if we can get her address; but if not, we will have to wait until night, when she will have to come to the theater to play, and Foxey can see her then."

So saying, the boys walked off on their way to the theater, and arriving there, Will went up to box-office and said:

"May I ask, sir, the address of Miss Flora Dale, of your company?"

"It is contrary to rule to give the address of our people without their permission," was the reply.

"It is very important, sir, for me to see Miss Dale."

"I cannot break through the rule, sir; but is not that young man a brother of Miss Dale?" and he pointed to Foxey.

"Oh no, sir."

"He looks enough like her to be."

"As you do not comply with my request, sir, I shall have to ask you to do so on this authority!" and Wizard Will unbuttoned his coat and showed his insignia of office, as Special Police, United States Marshal, Secret Service Officer and Chief of the Boys' Detective League.

The box-office man looked amazed, and his respect for the youth rose rapidly, while he said:

"Of course I did not know you as an officer, sir, or suspect one so young of being a detective; but may I ask if Miss Dale has done aught that is wrong?"

"My reason for finding her, sir, was that two scamps knew that she was paid off last night, and took a stand on the street where she lives to waylay her on her way home."

"My friend here knows Miss Dale well, and overheard their little game, so he warned her as she got off the car, borrowed her bonnet and circular, which he has in that bundle, and captured the two men."

"The deuce he did! Why, you are a game pair!" said the delighted box-office man.

"Thank you," and Will smiled, and continued:

"When he gave the scamps over to a policeman, my friend tried to find Miss Dale to return her hat and cloak, but she had gone, so we came here to find her."

"That is a strange story, and yet it gives no solution, other than fear, of Miss Dale's action this morning, for she was here an hour ago, paid back her salary earned during the two weeks she was with us, and severed her engagement."

Will was now astounded, and Foxey said:

"Won't she play here any more?"

"No; she offered to pay us a bonus to release her, but we did not demand it, as we felt assured she had some good reason for her action from what she said."

"I cannot understand it," said Will.

"She was doubtless afraid to be out alone at night, after last night's experience."

"She is no coward, sir, as I have reason to know; but if you will kindly give me her address I will go up and see what was her motive."

"Here is her address. Number one hundred and seven West—th street."

"Thank you, sir; I will stop and tell you if I discover anything of interest about her."

"Do so; and whenever you and your friend have a night off, drop in and see the play, for I will always be able to find you seats—my name is Walter Sinn."

"Thank you, Mr. Sinn," returned Will; and taking a car, the two young ferrets went in search of number one hundred and seven.

The place was easily found; but not so Flora, the Flower Girl, for the landlady told them that she had left, bag and baggage, an hour before.

"Do you know where she went, madam?" asked Will.

"No; she did not say."

"She drove away?"

"Yes, in a carriage."

"Who got the carriage for her?"

"She returned in it."

"Which way did it go, or do you know, madam?"

"Around the corner yonder, and up-town."

"Thank you, madam," and the boys departed.

"Foxey."

"Yes, Cap'n Billy."

"This is strange."

"It is."

"She does not intend to be found out."

"It seems so."

"She must be found, though."

"Sure."

"Will you undertake it?"

"I'll do it, Cap'n Billy."

"Let us go back to the theater and see if she went there in a carriage, for if not, she either got one upon the stand near there, or at one of the livery stables on her way up."

"Sure."

"Well, you have that much to work on, Foxey."

"It's more than I had before, Cap'n Billy."

"And yet you found her?"

"Yes, and let me tell you something strange, pal o' mine."

"What is it, Foxey?"

"She sung an operatic piece last night, and they encored her, and when she came out again she sung a ballad, Annie Laurie, and they brought her out again."

"Then she made me jump, and make a fool of myself, for she sung a song I never heard but one person sing, and that was my mother, and she taught it to me when I was but five years old, and I have never forgotten it."

"This was strange, Foxey; but may I ask you a question?"

"Ask away."

"Why is it, when you talk so earnestly, you always drop into the street dialect and slang?"

"Gosh! does I?" and Foxey was himself again.

"Yes, you do, and sometimes I think you are not what you say you are."

"I'm only a poor vagabond, Billy, a waif you picked up and are making a man of; but here's ther theater."

Inquiry at the office of Mr. Sinn showed that the Flower Girl had not come to the theater in a carriage, but the stage doorkeeper said that the young girl had come there and packed up her theatrical wardrobe, and then going off, had returned soon after with a carriage to take them away in.

"That settles it, Foxey, and you have your clew."

"Now I leave you to follow it, while I go down to the quarters and pick my men to go out home with me to try and catch that midnight visitor who was at the cottage last night."

Then the two friends separated, and Wizard Will telegraphed his mother not to expect him home, and then set to work to get four boys from the League to go out with him after dark.

As he was talking to Captain Daly at the police station, to his surprise and alarm his sister Pearl entered, and he learned that his mother needed him, and the two started homeward at once, little dreaming what a scene awaited them in the little cottage.

CHAPTER XVI.

WIZARD WILL'S VOW.

WIZARD WILL had been most anxious about his mother during the entire day, for in her excitement the night before, he had seen how ill she really was.

The coming of Pearl had alarmed Will, and he hastened to catch the last train back home.

Arriving at the depot they found old Joe awaiting them, and they were surprised at what he told them.

He had said:

"Liza done been up to de village, Massa Will, arter med'cine ther new doctor sent her for, and I guesses ef we hurries the ole horse we overtakes her."

"What new doctor, Uncle Joe?" asked Will.

"Ther one thet came then, sah, and when he found Missy Pearl done gone, he sent 'Liza to the village."

"I can't think who he can be, Uncle Joe, and I fear mother may be worse, so push ahead as fast as you can."

It was now dark and Joe made the old horse go at a pace that surprised him.

Just as they came in sight of the cottage they passed 'Liza, but as it was so near they did not take her in.

"Who is with mother, Aunt Eliza?" called out Will.

"The doctor, sah," came the answer after them, and Will sprung out and dashed into the house, leaving Pearl to follow.

No light was visible, and entering the parlor he called to his mother.

No answer came, and he took a match from his pocket, and turning to the table, upon which stood a lamp, he lighted it.

Then he turned to enter his mother's room adjoining and which also was dark; but as he did so, he heard a loud shriek behind him, and bounding into the parlor Pearl cried:

"Brother! oh, brother!"

Then his eyes fell upon the form of his mother lying near the window, and the sight sent the blood surging through his heart in torrents.

In an instant he was kneeling by her side, and a cry escaped his lips as he saw that she was dead.

"Dead! dead! and she has been murdered!"

Such were his words, and the brave boy bent low over the prostrate form and burst into tears.

Softly to his side crept Pearl, and kneeling there she covered her face with her hands and sobbed bitterly.

The old negroes, alarmed by the cry of Pearl, now came in and stood in the doorway, a look of horror upon their faces.

A moment thus of painful silence, and then Wizard Will rose to his feet.

Then, in a voice hoarse with grief and passion, he pointed one hand at the body, by which Pearl still knelt, and with the other raised above, he said:

"Mother, you have been murdered, but so help me God, I vow to track your murderer to the gallows!"

"Amen!" came in fervent tones from old Joe and Eliza, who stood in the doorway, and while the old negress advanced and led Pearl away, Wizard Will and Joe raised the body of the murdered woman and placed it in her room.

"Now, Joe, drive right back to the village and report what has been done, and send for me two telegrams," and Wizard Will hastily wrote a telegram to Foxey and another to Captain Daly, asking them to come right out to the cottage.

Then leaving the body in the care of old Eliza, Will called to Pearl to accompany him, and the two walked out together.

"Pearl, what time did you leave this afternoon?" he asked.

"On the six o'clock train, brother."

"You left Eliza with mother?"

"No, I went by the cabin to tell her to go to mother, and she was making bread, and said she would go right down to the cottage."

"Did mother seem much worse than when I left this morning?"

"She appeared strangely nervous, and when your telegram came, she said that she could not spend a night without your being here."

"Who brought the telegram?"

"Johnny, the messenger boy."

"Did you see any stranger about the village or station?"

"No, brother, but I saw a sail-boat, a cat-rig, with one man in it, pass up the river before the telegram came, and it was very close inshore."

Will pondered a moment, and then returned to the cottage.

"Aunt Eliza," he asked, "what time did you come to the cottage after Pearl left?"

"I didn't come not at all, Massa Will, for you see I had my hands in de bakin', and when I got all ready to go de strange man come to de door, and tell me he was de new doctor, and ask me to go to de village and git de medicine for your ma, and dat he would stay wid her until I got back."

"What medicine did you get?"

"He give me a paper wid writin' on it, and I give it to de druggist, and de things are in dat bundle dere, while he told me to keep de change out ob a ten dollar bill."

Will stepped forward and picked up the package, which was neatly done up.

Breaking the string he discovered a small paper, labeled half an ounce of quinine, another of two ounces of sulphur, a vial of paregoric; a second of gentian and a third of camphor.

"Aunt Eliza, these things were sent you as an excuse to get you away, and to detain you while they were being put up."

"Oh, Lordy! dat mar looked like a nice gemman, Massa Will."

"Looks don't make the man nowadays, Aunt Eliza; but describe him, please."

"He were a tall man, dressed in black, and lookin' mighty fine."

"Then he had a full beard, black it was, and wore a soft hat pulled down over his eyes."

"That was the man I saw in the cat-rig boat, brother, for I looked at him with your glass," cried Pearl.

"And that man was my mother's murderer, and I will find him, for one so cruel as he cannot escape justice," was Wizard Will's stern rejoinder, as he turned and led Pearl from the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CLEW.

OLD Joe did not spare the horse, in going back to the village on his important errand, and it was not long before the coroner, the constable and others put in an appearance at the cottage.

Wizard Will told them of the midnight intruder the night before, which had so alarmed his mother, and then of the stranger who had so cleverly gotten Aunt Eliza out of the way, while his sister had gone to the city after him.

The finding of Mrs. Raymond dead in the parlor, slain by a knife-thrust in her back, was also told, and Will placed the matter in the hands of the coroner.

Then he left Pearl in the care of Aunt Eliza, for several kind neighbors had now come in, and getting into the carriage, had Joe drive him back to the village.

He first went to the drug store and asked the proprietor to let him see the prescription that Eliza had brought.

It was handed to him, with a word of consolation from the good-hearted druggist.

"I wish to keep this, Doctor Duell," he said.

"Certainly, Master Will, if it will be of any service to you," was the answer.

"It will be of great service to me, sir," and Will drove to the depot.

Just as he reached there he met Johnny the messenger boy, freed from work, and starting home.

"Johnny?"

"Yes, sir."

"I know more than you think I do, and I wish you to tell me the truth."

"I don't tell no lies," was the sullen answer.

"If you do, I will know it, and you will be punished, for see here, Johnny. I am an officer, and I wish you to keep the secret," and Will showed his badges.

Johnny already had great respect for Will, who had often given him a quarter, when he came with a telegram, and now knowing that he was an officer he was positively awed at his greatness.

"Now, Johnny, you carried a dispatch out to the cottage this afternoon for my mother?"

"Yes, sir."

"At what time?"

"About four o'clock."

"Now Johnny, did any one see that dispatch?"

"The telegraph man gave it to me."

"I know that; but did you see any one on your way to my home?"

Johnny was silent an instant, and then said:

"I seen heaps of folks."

"Did you talk with any one?"

"I seen a man who spoke to me."

"Where?"

"Just where the road turns from the old dock to go to your home."

"I see; but tell me who the man was?"

"I never seen him afore."

"He was a tall man, with long black beard and a soft hat, drawn down over his eyes, was he not?"

"Yes."

"What did he say to you?"

"He asked me how far it was by the road to your cottage, and I told him half a mile."

"Had he not just landed from a cat-rig boat?"

"He was standing in the road when I seen him, but there was a boat with sail up at the dock."

"Did he ask you anything else?"

"He asked me where I was going?"

"And you told him?"

"Yes, sir."

"What else?"

"He wanted to know what I was going there for."

"And you told him?"

"Yes, sir."

"What then?"

"Nothing."

"Don't lie to me, Johnny, for, if you do, I'll take you to jail in New York City; but if you tell me the truth I will not punish you."

Johnny was scared, and he began to cry.

"I must know all, Johnny," said Wizard Will firmly.

"He asked me to let him see the dispatch, for he said he was a friend of yours, and your mother was sick, and if it was bad news, it would make her worse."

"But I told him I dasn't let him see it, and he said he would give me ten dollars, and he meant no harm, while he could open it so as nobody would know about it."

"And you let him see it?"

"Yes, sir," sobbed Johnny.

"And he paid you ten dollars?"

"Yes, sir."

"And then?"

"I took the telegram on and gave it to your sister."

"Well?"

"Then I came back."

"Did you see the man any more?"

"He was sailin' about in his boat, but I didn't speak to him again."

"All right, Johnny, now you can go; but don't speak of this to any one, and keep dark about my being an officer."

"I will, sir."

"If I told what you had done, you would get into serious trouble, so never do the like again, for a telegram in your hands is sacred, to be seen only by the one to whom it is addressed, and you would be severely punished, were it known that you showed it."

"I won't do it again, sir," and Johnny was glad to hasten away, as Wizard Will turned to meet the train, just then rolling up to the station.

Upon the train were Captain Daly, Foxey, several detectives, and half a dozen Boy Ferrets, for the chief had come prepared for work.

"My poor boy, you are indeed in deep sorrow," said Captain Daly, as he pressed Will's hands, and entering the carriage with Will, Uncle Joe drove them rapidly to the cottage, while Foxey and the others followed in village hacks that were in waiting at the depot.

"Any clew, Will?" asked Captain Daly, after Will had told the story as he knew it, of his mother's sad death.

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?"

"The writing on the paper sent to the drug store by old Eliza, is the same as in the Book of Doom I found in Elegant Ed's secret closet."

"Yes, but Elegant Ed is dead."

"So we supposed, sir; but Foxey escaped." "True; and he might have been saved also; but it is a remarkable coincidence if he was."

"It is indeed, sir, but I have another important fact to tell."

"Out with it, Will."

Then Wizard Will told of the man in the boat, whom Pearl had seen, and who was none other than the one who had sent Eliza to the village and paid Johnny to let him see the telegram.

"That man is the murderer, Will, and he evidently cruised about the river, watching the cottage, and, when he saw Pearl leave, he went to the cabin of the Eliza."

"Yes, sir, I am confident that he is the man who killed my poor mother, and I am equally as well assured that he is none other than Elegant Ed."

"He did so to be avenged on you, doubtless, if your theory is correct that it was he."

"Yes, sir, and I have yet to reap my revenge on him," was the grim response of Wizard Will, as the carriage drew up at the cottage gate.

CHAPTER XVII.

PICKING UP THE TRAIL.

THE sorrowing woman and devoted mother, Mrs. Raymond, was laid away in the village churchyard, and the little cottage home was broken up, while its doors were closed and Uncle Joe and Aunt Eliza lived in the rear part, to keep it from going to ruin.

As he could not leave his sister alone in her sorrow, Wizard Will took her to New York with him, and secured a snug little furnished flat up town, and a good, matronly woman, to take care of her, while she could go to a private school only a few blocks away.

Having become settled, Wizard Will then determined to devote himself to the one aim of his life, and that was the hunting down of his mother's murderer.

Who that murderer was he knew, for the black beard he wore, Will knew was false.

Another clew also he had found, and it told of the death-struggle between his mother and her slayer.

It was the day after the night on which the murder was committed, and Will and Foxey had walked down to the little dock.

Then the eyes of the young captain had fallen upon a piece of rope tied around a post, and which had been cut in two but recently, as it had been tied in a hard knot.

As they were examining it Foxey said:

"Cap'n Billy, what is that shining down in the water?"

Will's eye saw the glitter and securing a crab net he fished it up and his face grew dark and threatening as he said:

"Foxey, this is the knife that killed my poor mother; and see, her hair is entangled in the hilt!"

Foxey took it in a reverential way and undid the shreds of long hair, and handed them to Will, while he said:

"Here is a name on the hilt, Cap'n Billy, and it proves you are right in saying Elegant Ed did the deed, for see here."

There was a name engraven there, and it was:

"ELEGANT ED."

"Yes, he is the murderer, beyond all doubt," said Will.

"How he escaped that night we were run down, God only knows," Foxey remarked, and with the certain knowledge of who was the murderer, and that the pretended doctor, who had sent Eliza off on an errand, the man whom Pearl had seen in the boat, and he who had read the telegram Messenger Boy Johnny had been taking to the cottage, were one and the same, the two Boy Ferrets had a firm basis to work upon.

Once settled, and feeling that his sister was cared for, Wizard Will took his first step to keep the solemn vow which he had made over his mother's dead body.

He knew that he had the entire machinery of the law to help him, with a right to call upon the police force, the Secret Service men, and his own League of Boy Ferrets.

The guilty man he had believed dead; but now known to be living, he must be found out.

Yet, with all this power at his back, Wizard Will understood fully how hard was the task before him.

Elegant Ed was a man who had always eluded the hundreds of policemen and detectives upon his track.

He had a price upon his head, and yet no one had been able to earn it.

He was utterly fearless, bold, cunning, intelligent, wicked as sin itself, and desperate, so he would not be taken easily.

Wizard Will had believed that the Land Sharks had been driven out of the city, and yet their chief had struck a death-blow right at him.

In one way he might be tracked, and that was by the finding of Flora the Flower Girl.

But it seemed almost as impossible to find her as it was Elegant Ed.

Foxey had in vain tried to find the hack that had taken Flora away from her boarding-place.

He had visited all the stands, and the stables, but without success, and he was striving to discover some other scheme to work, and was consulting with his comrades one morning in their quarters, when Wizard Will entered.

"Foxey, I have found the hackman," said Will, as he entered.

"No!" cried the surprised Foxey.

"Yes, and I'll tell you how."

"You know I was certain that the Flower Girl had taken a hack from the stand near the

theater, and as I have seen but one there several times I thought that might be the reason for the hackmen not knowing that one of their number had been engaged by a young girl, they all being absent at the time.

"So I picked out my man, told him my idea, and offered to give him a twenty-dollar bill if he found the hack that the Flower Girl had hired.

"The result was that when I came by the stand this morning, my man called to me, and pointed out a carriage near, saying:

"That's the one."

"I paid him his pay, and walked over to the hackman, who was seated in his carriage reading a paper.

"You carried a young girl from here to the stage-door of the — Theater, my man, and then drove her home, waited for her, and again took her and her bag and baggage somewhere else?" I said.

"He seemed surprised, and answered:

"I did, sir, and I guess there is no secret in it."

"Oh, no, only I wished to find out where you left her."

"At No. 100 East — street."

"Thank you," and giving him some cigar money—

"Which he will spend for drinks," said Foxey.

"Doubtless, but I cleared my conscience of meanness, from having obtained a secret from him for nothing."

"Did you go to the number, Cap'n Billy?"

"No, but I am going now, and I wish you to accompany me."

"I'm ready," and the two friends started on their errand.

To find the number was an easy matter, but to find Flora the Flower Girl was another matter, for the lady said she had only remained three days, and then paying her for the full week, had gone to Philadelphia.

"Did she leave any address in Philadelphia, madam?" asked the disappointed young captain.

"No, but a telegram came to her after she left, and I opened it, as I did not know but it might be important, and need answering, and it gave her an address to go to in Philadelphia."

"Do you mind telling me?"

"I will get it for you," and in a few minutes the lady returned with a telegram.

It was addressed to "Miss Flora Dale," and the contents were:

"I do not understand why you are coming here; but put up at the La Pierre House and I will call there for you."

There was no signature, but the telegram was enough to start on, and when the two youths left the house Wizard Will said:

"You must go to Philadelphia, Foxey."

"Certain."

"You must play the young gentleman, dress up in your best, wear a red wig, bang it in front, part it in the center, put on eye-glasses, a standing collar, affect the boy swell and put up at the La Pierre, at the same time carrying various disguises in your trunk, for Flora's going to Philadelphia leads me to believe the Land Sharks have gone there."

"Likely."

"If you get news and need me, telegraph me at once, and send the message to Captain Daly's, our quarters and my home, for I will be at one of the places within a few hours."

"I'll do it, Cap'n Billy; but did you notice that the lady asked who the girl was in mourning for, and said that she was dressed in deep black?"

"Yes, I noticed it, and supposed that it was worn as a disguise."

"Then I am to look for a girl in black?"

"Yes, Foxey, and luck to you."

Two hours after Foxey was on the train on his way to Philadelphia, and even Wizard Will would not have known him, so completely had he metamorphosed himself into a youthful dandy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN EAVESDROPPER.

THE clerk behind the office in the La Pierre House could hardly suppress a smile, when he saw a youth walk up to the register and ask in an affected way for a pleasant room for a few days.

The youth was, in appearance, what just now would be called a dude, and most any one would have mistaken him for an off-shoot of wealthy parents, who wished to impress upon him the knowledge that his brains were limited and his inheritance large.

He glanced over the register for several days back, and asked in a drawing tone:

"Is the lady who is down here as Miss Dale, New York, the actress of that name?"

"I cannot tell you, sir; but she is at present in the parlor, and you can see for yourself, if you know the lady you refer to."

"Ah, no, thanks. I merely asked, for I am from New York, you know—oh! number ninety-seven is my room, you say?"

"Yes, sir, and the boy will show you to it, now."

The youth followed the servant to the elevator, and was soon in a very delightful room, his trunk being immediately after brought in by the porter.

Hardly had the porter left when Foxey heard the door of an adjoining room open and some one enter.

"Strange that by accident I should get the room next to her, and that door opens between them," said the youth.

A moment after he said:

"Ah! she is not alone."

Just then a man's voice said:

"Don't be cross, Flo', for I could not come before, as I dared not leave my hiding-place; but who has the next room to you?"

"It is a closet, not a room, for I never hear a sound from there," answered a sweet voice.

A quick step around the room and the youth heard hard breathing, as the man seemed to be trying to look through the key-hole.

"I guess you are right, Flo', for all is dark, but I have to be very cautious, for that fool captain of ours came pretty near getting us all caught."

"How so?"

"A row between him and that devil, Wolf; but I don't blame the captain for being mad, as Wolf tried to entrap and kill him, so he might be chief, and got him to go on a cruise."

"I knew of this; but how did it terminate?"

"Their yacht was run down and all were drowned, excepting Wolf and the captain, and they got into the life-boat."

"But they fought it out there, and Wolf went overboard, and thought the captain did, too, while Elegant Ed was sure his lieutenant was drowned."

"Wolf found he was in shallow water and got ashore, and the captain drifted about in the boat, was picked up by a fishing-smack and came on here."

"Wolf arrived half an hour before him, and they had it hot and heavy with swords, right in our quarters, and the captain ran him through the heart, and left the body for us to bury in the cellar; but we concluded to dump it into the river, and the two men carrying it were caught by the police and chased home, leaving Wolf's body in the street, and we had just time to get out, losing all our booty and disguises, and so it took me some time to get rigged out again."

"And the captain?"

"He's in New York, for he said he had some business there."

"Was there not a boy on the yacht when it sunk?"

"Wolf said there was, one whom the captain had kidnapped."

"What became of him?"

"He went down with the yacht."

"He did not?"

"What, Flo'?"

"I say he did not."

"How do you know?"

"I saw the boy in New York several days ago, and he is one I had in my employ in the flower store; but he came there as a detective."

"The deuce! how were you so deceived?"

"That boy would deceive any one; but I liked him, and was drawn toward him in a way that I could not account for."

"And you saw him in New York lately?"

"I did."

"Since the loss of the yacht?"

"Yes, and knowing that he would track me to find the captain, I gave him the slip."

"You did well; but what brings you to Philadelphia?"

"To have a talk with you."

"What about?"

"Myself."

"You had better have stayed in New York."

"I think differently."

"Well, out with it, girl."

"Will you answer me truly?"

"Did I ever lie to you?"

"I do not know, and it is to find out if you have that I have come here."

"What do you wish to know?"

"Is this a likeness of my mother?" and she held out a miniature painting set in gold.

"It is."

"When did she die?"

"When you were five years old, or about that."

"Are you my father?"

"Of course I am."

"I do not believe you."

"Why not?"

"I feel that you are not."

"Why?"

"Well, I cannot tell the reason, but somehow my heart tells me that not one drop of your blood flows in my veins."

"Girl, you are wild."

"I so believe."

"Have I not treated you well?"

"Yes, you have given me a good education, reared me as a lady, I have had plenty of fine clothes and jewelry, you have been generous in letting me have all the money I needed and allowed me to have my way; but I have never held affection for you, as I could not love one I deemed a villain."

"Flo'?"

"I have known of the criminal life you led for a year past, since I overheard you talk with the captain, and I have wanted to run away from you; but I would not betray you, though I knew all, and could have hanged every man of the Land Sharks' band."

"I would not do that, and so tolerated you, hoping some day to be free from you."

"Now I am older, and I will no longer serve you, or be a foil to save you; so I will go my way; but before I do I wish to know if you have not deceived me in saying that you were my father?"

"Girl, you have suddenly become a woman, and but for the secret I hold over you, you would be a dangerous one."

"What secret do you hold over me?"

"Your parentage."

"Thank God! you are not then my father?"

"I am not."

"Who are my parents?"

"That is a secret I will make known only on conditions," was the reply of the man, and the dude in the next room scarcely dared draw a long breath, for he had heard every word that had been said.

CHAPTER XIX.

CONNECTING LINKS.

For a moment after the voice of the man in the adjoining room had said he would make known his secret to Flora the Flower Girl on certain conditions, a silence fell between them.

Lying upon the floor, his ear to the crack under the door—for the key-holes were closed up—the occupant of the next room waited as patiently as an Indian might have done, to hear more.

Presently the girl spoke, and she said in a low, distinct voice:

"What are your conditions, sir?"

"To tell you the secret of who you are?"

"Yes."

"I wish a large sum of money."

"I have saved up a considerable sum from what you have given me, and I made money in the flower-store while I was there; so I have nearly two thousand dollars, and I will give you all except a few hundreds to live on until I can get employment."

The man laughed, and the girl said:

"I have nothing more, except my jewelry."

"Bah! it is but a drop in the bucket, for I wish a couple of hundred thousand."

"Don't trifle with me, sir!"

"I do not intend to; but if you can get a fortune through me, will you give me one-third of it?"

"Certainly."

"Will you sign papers to that effect?"

"I will."

"Will you keep it secret that you do give me the money, and not let any one know other than what I tell you to?"

"I will."

"You will swear to this?"

"Yes."

"Well, Flo', you are not my child, as I said."

"I am very happy in knowing this."

"Your parents are dead, and they died when you were but five years old."

"Yes."

"They were very rich, and they left their fortune, fully a million, equally between you and your brother."

"My brother?"

"Yes, for you had a twin brother."

"Ah me! it seems now as though I remember him."

"I will tell you the whole story now, for I have your word, and you will not break it."

"No, I will not break my word."

"Well, your parents died, strange to say, within a few weeks of each other, your mother going first, and your father, I think, following her from a broken heart, for he loved her devotedly."

"Where was their home?"

"Never mind where."

"I thought you were to tell me all."

"That will come in good time."

"Your father drew up his will, leaving to you and your brother his fortune equally."

"It was to be divided when you both reached your eighteenth birthday anniversary, you being twins, as I said."

"The property was left in the hands of five executors to hold for you, and they were honest men."

"One of these was appointed your guardian, and he carried you to his home to live."

"He was a bachelor and he lived in fine style, so got a nurse and a governess to look after you."

"Now, I was a clerk in the office of the lawyer who drew up the will, and I knew all the particulars."

"I had a longing to win riches, so I gambled, and that made me go from bad to worse until I became a common thief."

"One day, some time after I had been discharged from the law-office, the idea struck me to make a fortune in a neat way, and I set out to do so."

"It needed some capital to work on, and so I went to work and robbed a country bank. I had to kill the cashier to get away with my booty, for he lived over the bank."

"Still, I got away with nine thousand dollars in bills, all good, and I struck out for the West."

"I bought a snug little farm, stocked it, and then I came East once more."

"I discovered that your bachelor guardian had died, and you and your brother were to be sent to boarding-school."

"Then it was my time to act, and I paid a pal well to kidnap you both and take you West."

"This he did, and, by a preconcerted plan, I went to a hotel where you were both stopping with him, accused him of stealing you, said you were my children, and took you away from him."

"I paid him well for his services, and carried you home with me."

"It comes back to me now like a shadowy dream," said the girl in a wondering kind of way.

"It doubtless will when you hear all."

"Well, I treated you kindly, for I liked you, though your brother was a little Tartar, and would not call me father."

"At last I saw that I must get rid of him, so I took him to a strange town one day and lost him in the streets."

"Of course he was too young to tell anything of importance, did not know my name even, or where he lived, and some kind gentleman, struck with his appearance, for he was a handsome little fellow, adopted him and took him home, for I kept my eye upon him, as I desired to know what became of him."

"And what did become of him?" asked Flora in a voice that quivered with emotion.

"His adopted father lived on a ranch, and one night the Indians attacked it and all hands were massacred."

"Oh, Heaven! what a sad fate for my poor brother."

"And you were his murderer," she said, sharply.

"No, the Indians."

"You sent him there."

"It was an accident, for I meant to keep a watch over him; but I sorrowed for him deeply."

"Go on."

"Well, Mo', I was always a gambler, and the result was that I gambled away my farm, and then I came East, bringing you with me."

"I put you at a fashionable boarding-school in Boston, and I set to work to make money."

"By gambling?"

"Yes."

"And by stealing?"

"Oh, yes; but I got money, and in time met Elegant Ed and joined the band of Land Sharks and you know how I kept first a fancy store over which they had rooms, and then the flower store."

"You accidentally found out what I was, and believing me to be your father, did not turn against me, and it showed your noble nature."

"Well, you have cared for me for a purpose?"

"Oh, yes, though I have been greatly attached to you."

"Your real purpose?"

"To turn up with you, just before your eighteenth birthday, and let you claim your inheritance."

"I have kept my eyes open, and those executors have an advertisement in the papers offering rewards for you and your brother."

"Now I am to go West, to my farm, which I bought back years ago, and there stay for awhile."

"Then, seeing an advertisement, I can come East with you, tell how I found you and your brother, as little children, in a rascal's hands, and that I took you as my own, and your brother was killed by Indians, while living at the house of a gentleman who had adopted him."

"I can say, that seeing the advertisement, I felt that it must be you, and I wish to offer the proofs, in the likeness of your mother, and more jewelry which you and your brother had on, with other things, at the time you were kidnapped."

"You can help me out, say I have been a father to you, and, when you get your property, you can give me my share, of two hundred thousand dollars."

"You have laid a deep plot and worked hard to attain riches."

"I have indeed, Flo'; but you will do as I ask?"

"Gladly, for I would give more, so happy am I in knowing you are not kindred of mine, and that I can get rid of you with money."

"You will never prosecute me?"

"Never."

"Well, we will start West in a couple of days, for I will leave the band—"

"To do so is death."

"I'll not let them suspect my intention, and they can never track me."

"It is your risk."

"Yes, and we can go to the little farm, spend a short while, and then return East, as soon as I see those men advertising again."

"What do you say?"

"I am ready at any time, and oh! so anxious to sever the link that binds me to you."

"Very well, within three days we start West; but I have certain matters to settle with the chief, so where are his quarters in New York now?"

"You know he belongs to one of the crack clubs there?"

"Yes, but which one?"

"The Pleasure Circle, I think, for I saw him in there as I passed some days ago."

"He goes by the name of Doctor Edgar, then?"

"Yes."

"Then I can reach him."

"Now good-afternoon, and expect me to come for you in a couple of days."

"I will be ready, sir," was the girl's reply, and the eavesdropper heard the door open and shut, and knew that the murderer and thief, by his own confession, had departed.

Then the young dandy slipped out of his room and went to a telegraph office and sent the following dispatch:

"To CAPTAIN WILL RAYMOND, }
—th Precinct Headquarters New York. }
"Come to me for I need you. Am at the La
Pierre House. FOXEY."

This dispatch was also sent to two other addresses, and then a quiet smile stole over the face of the youth who so closely resembled a duke, as he walked back to the hotel.

It was now dinner-time, and the seat given him by the head waiter was directly opposite to a young lady dressed in deep mourning.

One glance into her face and he recognized Flora, the Flower Girl; but she could not penetrate the startling disguise of Foxey, the Ferret.

CHAPTER XX.

SETTING TRAPS.

WHEN he had finished his dinner, Foxey left the table, delighted that Flora had not recognized him as her one-time shop-boy.

In fact, she had looked at him at first with a glance of contempt at his foppish and affected appearance, and then smiled at his seeming innocence of being an object of amusement to waiters and guests alike.

Now Foxey was a cool-headed youth and a plucky one, and playing a part as he was for a good purpose, he did not care a fig for the fact that he was being laughed at as a duke.

He went about complacently on his way, asked the clerk to direct him to a place of

amusement, and killed time by going to the theater.

Upon his return he received word, without apparent surprise, that an old friend, Midshipman Ray Williams, had arrived, and, recognizing his name, was anxious to see him.

Now Foxey had registered as Frank Foxwell, a name that Wizard Will knew he had often done Secret Service under, and knowing that it was his young captain, the youth said:

"I will go up and see my friend—ah! his room is near my own."

And he went up to the chamber where the pretended Midshipman Ray Williams was located.

As he entered, in obedience to the knock, Foxey was met by a trim-looking youth in a middy's uniform and with blonde hair that, in contrast to his dark eyes, completely changed his appearance.

"Well, Foxey, I would not go to bed until I had seen you," said Wizard Will, for he it was.

"I am glad, indeed, to see you, and we'll have a little talk," and Foxey crossed to a door and turned the knob.

"That communicates with another room, and is locked," said Will.

"Yes, but I have just had some experience of an important kind, through the door of an adjoining room, and, with your permission I will ring the bell and have you change your room, to one that has no other opening into it."

"You can say we wish to talk until late, and don't wish to disturb the party next door."

Will saw then Foxey had a reason for the request, so the bell was rung, and the room was changed.

"Ah, this is a nice one, for it is cut off wholly, and we can make as much racket as we please."

"The fact is, my man, we are noisy boys, and when we get to going, no one can sleep that is very near us," and Will slipped a silver souvenir into the hand of the attendant that more than repaid him for the trouble of changing.

Having seen that the man did not remain outside to listen, Foxey drew a chair up near to Will and told him all that he had heard.

"This is remarkable, Foxey, and you are a trump to get at the bottom facts of a case; but you could not get the address of the villain who has so deceived Flora?"

"She has it, of course, for she telegraphed him from New York; but then I think we had better arrange our plans so as to catch him after he goes to his farm in the West with her."

"When he comes here again you can dog him to his quarters, where his pals are, so as to know their address, and thus be able to bag them all, and Elegant Ed too, if he should re-turn here, which I doubt."

"Then I can be on hand to go West with the man and Flora, find out where his farm is, and then telegraph you to come on."

"Would it not be well to see Flora and have a talk with her?"

"No, indeed, for she would not betray them for she has given her pledge, and will not break it."

"You are right, and I believe it would be best to capture the man at his home first, getting a requisition on the Governor of the State for him, and then bring him East."

"Of course, for the girl's sake, I do not care to have her brought before the public, and the charge we must make against him, to hang him, is for robbing the bank and killing the cashier, for we can find out the time and place where the crime was committed."

"That will hang him and get him out of the way of Flora."

"That is the best way to work it, Cap'n Billy, for, if we made a descent upon the Land Sharks first, some might escape, and it would get into the papers, and that cunning rascal might leave his farm and take Flora with him."

"You are right, Foxey, and I will find out about the bank to-morrow, and then write Jicksey, whom I left in charge of the League, as we were both absent, to go up to the Club and shadow Elegant Ed, making no sign until he hears from me."

"Better write him to shadow him, even if he leaves New York."

"Yes, even if he goes to the North Pole."

"I wish to run this band and Elegant Ed to earth through our Boy Ferrets alone, and report to Captain Daly only when we have them in the trap we set for them; but, Foxey, no one on earth would ever know you in that disguise, and you do look so much like a softy I can hardly believe it is you."

"It's me, all the same, Cap'n Billy; but your middy's uniform and that rig changed you more than one would imagine."

"You do not think Flora's sharp eyes would detect me?"

"I would not risk it, and you had better go to another hotel in the morning."

"So I think; but now let us get what rest we can, for there is hard work before us, Foxey," and the Boy Ferrets parted for the night, each well satisfied with what had been accomplished.

CHAPTER XXI.

PLANNING A JOURNEY.

MATTERS certainly seemed to be warming to a focus as far as the capture of the Land Sharks were concerned.

Flora the Flower Girl had been shadowed and found, and the secret of her life was known.

The wicked man who had plotted for long years, separated her from her brother, and thus been the cause of his death, had been run to earth, and there was no danger of his being able to escape from Foxey's keen eyes, even if he had known that he was being shadowed to his doom.

With Wizard Will in Philadelphia to find out the hiding-place of the Land Sharks, Foxey dismissed them from his mind, while he did not feel any anxiety regarding Elegant Ed's being run to earth, for, once Jicksey set his eyes on the chief of the Land Sharks, he was aware they would not be taken off, for Foxey and Wizard Will knew well the youth who had been left in charge of the Boy Ferrets' League.

In fact, Jicksey's pet name was Leech, as he was known to hang on to a case with such leech-like tenacity.

At the hotel Foxey still ate his meals at the table with Flora, to that young lady's amusement, for the odd-looking youth excited the spirit of fun in her composition.

One day, while at dinner a waiter came in and said:

"Your father is in the parlor to see you, miss."

"I will be out within a few minutes," was the reply.

Foxey had just begun his dinner, and how to get out was the question.

To leave, to one of Flora's keen mind, might cause suspicion, and he was, for a moment non-plused.

But Foxey had an inventive turn of mind, and he showed it.

He put a spoonful of soup into his mouth, coughed, strangled, spluttered, and, with his handkerchief to his face left the dining-room, few giving the supposed dude any sympathy.

Five minutes after he was in his room, lying upon the floor, his ear to the crack beneath the door.

He had not long to wait before he heard a key go into the door, and two persons entered, as he could tell by their steps.

"Well, sir, have you decided when to start?" asked Flora coldly.

"Yes, we go to-night on the Express."

"Shall I meet you at the depot?"

"No, I will call here for you at nine o'clock in carriage."

"I will be ready: but did you see Elegant Ed?"

"Yes, for I went over to New York."

"You found him at the club I suppose."

"No, he was not there, and had not been, for he is getting more cautious every day."

"It seems he has been in some mischief, a kill-in-affair, I inferred from what he said, and he has bought a yacht and is living on board of it."

"A yacht?"

"Yes, a pretty little schooner, anchored off Forty-second street and he has a crew and servants on board and plays the rich Cuban dodge now."

"Why you would not know him, for he wears eye-glasses, wears a wig of long hair, waxes the ends of his mustache and has stained his face very dark and wears a Panama hat and the attire of a rich Cuban planter."

"Yes, he is a remarkable man for the false colors he assumes, but how did you find him?"

"He found me, for he has eagle eyes, and picked me up on the street as I was passing."

"He paid you I suppose, for that is what you went for?"

"Yes, there was a gambling debt between us, and I got it, while, to avoid suspicion of desiring to leave, I asked him to make me an officer of the band, and he said he would think of it."

"Do you want any money?"

"No, I have all I need; but how will you appear to-night?"

"In the sailor costume I now wear."

"You better take an ordinary civilian's suit, as it will attract less attention."

"You are always right, Flo'."

"Did Elegant Ed ask about me?"

"Yes, and he seemed to feel that you had given him away, as to where he lived, so that Boy Ferret found him out; but he did not think you did it intentionally, only was not smart enough to get ahead of the boy."

"Did he tell you he did me the honor to ask me to become his wife?"

"No."

"Well he did."

"I wonder."

"Did he not know that I was an heiress?"

"He has always suspected it, and laughed at me when I said you were my daughter; but I must be off now, get my tickets, engage our sleeping berths, and—"

"I wish a state-room for myself."

"You shall have it, Flo'."

"I will be ready promptly; but are you sure you were not recognized in New York and dogged here?"

"I kept a watch out for that, you may be sure."

"And you are not under the eye of the policemen?"

"Not I; why do you ask?"

"I do not wish to be dogged; and captured in the company of a man known to be what you are, for I would be judged by the company I keep."

"You do not care to be considered an accomplice?"

"Not I."

"No danger, Flo', for all goes well, and in a few days we will be living comfortably upon my farm, and no one will suspect me of being a villain."

"Good-afternoon and expect me at nine," and so saying the man left the room.

"I have but a short time to prepare, but I will do it," muttered Foxey, as he slipped out of his room and took a carriage to the Continental Hotel where Wizard Will was stopping.

CHAPTER XXII.

A FELLOW-PASSENGER.

"YOU'LL be as snug as a bug in a rug here, Flo'," said the man who pretended to have been the young girl's father, and who now, starting for his former home, had resumed his old name of Ben Bancroft.

He had ushered the maiden into the state-room of the car, and cosy quarters they were for her, and she soon made herself comfortable.

"I will be right near you, Flo', if you need anything; but until we get started I will sit in here with you."

"Do so," said Flora, who saw that, in spite of his assumed manner, the man was nervous, and watched every one with suspicion who came in.

"All aboard!" sung out the conductor out on the platform, and Ben Bancroft breathed more freely. "All aboard!"

"Hold on, conductor man, I hain't aboard!" cried a shrill voice, and a laugh followed from the crowd: there was some confusion on the platform, and into the car the porter tumbled an old lady.

She carried a hand-box in her arms, hung to an old-time carpet-sack with one hand and a huge umbrella and bird-cage with the other.

"I'm aboard, nigger man, so tell the conductor he kin start the mackeen agoing, but not to go too fast until my narves gets accustomed to ther rattlin' an' rakkit."

"Yes ma'am," said the polite colored porter, and he led her to the nearest section and arranged her baggage on a seat, while he said:

"What is your number, ma'am?"

"I hain't no number, for I hain't been in no jail to have a tag put on me."

Ben Bancroft shuddered at the word jail, but Flora seemed to enjoy the situation.

"I want to see your ticket, ma'am."

"Ah, yes, it's in my puss, and that are in my stocking, fer I hain't goin' to be robbed if I knows it."

"I'll look at it after awhile, ma'am," and the porter was glad to get away.

The old woman had now sat down, and still clung to her umbrella as a means of defense it seemed, for she held it in a threatening way.

Before her was her carpet-sack, band-box and canary cage and had any unfortunate touched either by mistake, he would have felt the weight of the blue cotton umbrella, doubtless.

The old woman had a lady-like look, and yet she appeared awful green, and to be traveling for the first time.

Her gray hair was combed smoothly over

each temple, she was dressed in black, and wore an old style of bonnet, with large gold spectacles that completely concealed her eyes.

As she seemed alarmed Flora felt sorry for her, for the train was now dashing swiftly along, and said:

"I will go and quiet the old lady's fears for she is really frightened."

"Better let her alone," growled Bancroft.

Paying no heed to his remark, Flora walked over and took a seat by the old lady, saying in a kind tone:

"You need not be alarmed, madam, for there is no danger."

"Is it a-thunderin'?" gasped the old lady.

"Oh, no, that is the noise of the train."

"My! but hain't he pushing?"

"We have to run fast to make the distance on time; but there is no danger, and I will ask the porter to make up your berth so that you can go to bed."

"Where is my bed-room?"

"This, where you are sitting will be it I suppose; but let me see your ticket."

"You look kind, and hain't no gal sharper, as I has read on?"

"Oh, no, I would not do you an injury for the world."

"I believe you; well, I'll git my purse," and stooping over the old lady fished it out of her stocking and handed it to Flora, who soon found the ticket.

"Yes, this is your section, and you had better put your purse back, but keep your ticket in your hand, for the conductor will soon call for it."

"Here, porter, be good enough to make this lady's section up."

"Yes, miss," and telling her to come into her state-room Flora led the way.

The old lady followed, but she took with her all of her baggage.

"Is this your pa?" she asked, looking at Bancroft, who, seeing that Flora would not lie, said:

"Yes, madam, that's my little girl."

"I declare! but she don't look like you, for she's awful pretty; favors her mother, it's likely?"

"Yes, madam."

"What is your name?"

"Bancroft."

"Any kin to Josiah Bancroft down in Yarmouth?"

"No, madam."

"What's your name, my child?"

"Flora."

"Why it's a pretty name, and a pretty gal bears it; but where is you from?"

"We are just from New York, but are going out to Kansas."

"Well, I declare! I'm going right there."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, for I've got a son living in Kansas, and he's married out there, though I wanted him to marry the parson's darter, up in Bellows Falls, where I live."

"But he didn't, and they wants me to come out to see 'em, and so I has started."

"I drove down to Hartford and took the boat to New York, for I wouldn't try ther train, and then I comes by boat to Philadelphia, where I has a sister living—maybe you seen her come to see me safe off on the train?—No; well, folks says we resembles amazin'."

"Now I has took the train for Kansas, and but for you I'd be awful scared."

"You must not be alarmed, madam, and as we go your way, we will take good care of you."

"You is mighty kind, and you shows it in your face; but where is your home in Kansas?"

"Not far from Topeka," volunteered Ben Bancroft.

"Waal now! there is just where I is going, and my son is ter meet me there at the tavern—I has the name writ down; maybe you know my son, mister?"

"What is the name?"

"Zeke!—we calls him Zeke—Ledbetter; I was a Jinkins afore I was married—Sophy Jinkins."

"I don't know him," said Bancroft.

"Waal, you must let me interdocce yer, for he'll be awful proud to know one who has tuk sich good care of his old mother."

The section was now made up, and Flora helped the old lady to retire, and from that time on to the end of their trip both the young girl and Bancroft devoted themselves to the care of their unsophisticated fellow-passenger, the man remarking:

"The old woman will help as a foil should any one be on my track."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FERRETS' PLOT.

ALL along the journey Flora was most kind to the good old woman, and upon arriving in Topeka, as her son did not meet her at the train, as she had said, they took her to the hotel with them.

Here Ben Bancroft hired a vehicle to drive himself and Flora to the farm, some twenty miles away, and bidding their old fellow-passenger good-by, they left her at the hotel to await her son's coming.

The old lady watched them depart, from the piazza, and as they disappeared around a corner she said to the landlord:

"It's a likely driver they've got, and if my son don't come, I'll have to git him to drive me to his place, if you knows who he is."

"Oh, yes, he is from my brother's stable, and he'll take you where you want to go, if your son don't come for you," answered the landlord.

The old woman thanked the landlord and then took a stroll about the town.

After an hour's walk she returned to the hotel and called for a telegraph messenger.

She wrote a telegram, and a long one, put it in an envelope, addressed it to the operator, sealed it, and told the boy to have it sent at once, giving him a quarter to make him the more anxious to do her bidding.

Thus the day passed away, and she told the landlord she would like to see the driver who had taken her friends to their farm.

"He'll be back late ma'am, and I'll send him up in the morning," was the reply, and in the morning the man appeared.

"You got my friends home all right, sir?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am, and I drove it in four hours, though it's a long road and a bad one."

"Could you tell me just how to get to the place, should my son take a notion to go by there with me when he comes?"

The man gave her explicit directions, especially as she told him she might wish him to take her there also, if her son did not come.

And so another day passed, and a night, and a young man arrived on the train and went to the hotel.

He asked to be shown to the room of the old lady, and said he was her son, but he had come down from Leavenworth, not expecting her so soon.

He was an honest-faced country boy, with long yellow hair and an awkward manner about him that showed he was what might be called green.

The moment the mother and son were alone together a change came over the faces of both, and the latter said:

"Here I am, Foxey."

"I knew you'd get here on time, Cap'n Billy, soon as you heard from me," was the reply of the supposed old woman.

"Yes, I took the train an hour after getting your telegram, stopped at Leavenworth for your letter you said you would write there, and fixed up, as you suggested, in this rig."

"You look like a country youth from toe to top-knot, Cap'n Billy; but did you come alone?"

"No, indeed, I have two of the boys with me."

"And you got the requisition from the governor?"

"Oh, yes, my papers and letters will do all I wish, and I'll go to-day to see the Governor of Kansas."

"It will be best; but where are the other boys?"

"At another hotel; but what have you done?"

In a few words Foxey told the young detective captain all, from leaving New York to the arrival, adding:

"And the driver who took them to the farm can drive us there."

"Have you any plan of action?"

"My idea was to get an officer here to serve us, by going with me as my son."

"We could go ahead in a buggy, you following with the driver who took them."

"I can say our road lay by their place, and learning where they lived I concluded to stop, and that we had passed some parties back on the road with a broken-down horse, and this would be an excuse for your coming up, when we can simply arrest Bancroft—you, of course, taking the leading part."

"Your plan is a good one, Foxey, and tomorrow we will carry it out, as soon as I get back from my visit to the governor, to show the requisition of our New York governor for Bancroft."

An hour after Wizard Will was on the train

going on his mission, and the next day he returned with the proper papers; and in the mean time Foxey, still in his disguise of an old woman, had gone to the Police Headquarters, made known who he was and his purpose, and asked for a detective to accompany him to Bancroft's house.

This request was granted by the genial chief, who praised Foxey upon his detective work and remarkable disguise, and one of the best men were assigned to the duty of accompanying him.

Two vehicles were then secured at the livery stable, the same driver who had taken Bancroft to his farm being engaged, and he drove the supposed old woman and her pretended son, the detective, while Wizard Will and his two comrades from the League followed behind.

They planned to arrive at Bancroft's farm late in the afternoon, when he was most likely to be at home.

It was near the sunset hour when Foxey and the detective drove up to the farm-house, the other vehicle following a couple of miles behind.

It was a pleasant farm-house, situated a hundred yards back from the road, and with good out-buildings near.

It had an air of neglect, and in fact had been in other hands for years.

As the carriage drew up near the door, Flora was visible, dressed in a neat calico, and with the appearance of having been attending to household duties.

At a glance she recognized the old lady, and running out, assisted her to alight and kissed her affectionately, for the poor girl was glad to see a familiar face in that far Western land.

"I am so glad to see yer, dear, and I wants to interdoce my son."

"Hain't he a strappin' big feller?"

"Come, son, take off your hat and act the gentleman, for this young lady was as good to me as if she'd 'a' been my own darter."

"Is yer pa at home, Florie?"

"He is in the barn; but how strange that your road home leads you by this farm, and I am so glad to see you."

"Of course you will remain all night?"

"Waal, it's more'n likely ef yer kin tuck us away."

"We can take care of you, though the house is not in the best of order; still you shall not go on."

"There's yer pa now, and he recognizes me, sart'in; but I mustn't forgit to tell him that there's a vehicle back down the road with three gents in it, and they wants a horse in place of one o' theirs that hain't worth much."

Just then Bancroft came up, and he gave the supposed old lady and her son as cordial a welcome as one of his nature was capable of.

As for a spare horse for the other carriage, he said he had but one animal he had just bought for his own use, and he could not spare him.

"We will have to give them shelter at least, and in the morning their horse will doubtless be able to continue the journey," said Flora.

"There they comes now," said the detective, and the vehicle came in sight, the horses at a slow walk.

Flora led Foxey into the house, gave him a room, and said:

"Your son can occupy that one, while the strangers can sleep in the parlor."

"Oh, they'll git along all right, Florie, and don't you be surprised if them men behaves a leetle strange."

"They've been drinking, doubtless; but I do not mind them," and Foxey went out on the piazza with Flora.

The other carriage had just driven up, and its occupants leaped out.

Advancing quickly toward the group on the piazza, Wizard Will, still rigged like a country lout, said quickly:

"Pard, we wants to stay all night here, and, for fear you may object, I'll just tell you now that you are my prisoner, Ben Bancroft!"

A yell of rage broke from the lips of the man, and a cry of surprise from Flora at what she saw and heard, for five revolvers covered the heart of the Land Shark, and like an entrapped wolf, he stood at bay an instant, his face growing whiter and whiter, and then, as he saw that all was lost, that the end of his hopes had come, the blood surged to his heart and brain, and he sunk in a swoon upon the piazza.

"Is he dead?" eagerly cried Flora, springing toward him.

"No, he has but fainted."

"He must not die until he has told me a secret," cried Flora, anxiously.

"He must not die thus, for the gallows awaits

him; but all that he can tell you I know, for I have his secret," Wizard Will said, calmly.

"Who are you?—ah! You are Wizard Will!" she cried.

"Yes, and this old lady is—Foxey," Wizard Will replied quietly, and the cry that broke from Flora's lips showed the utter amazement she felt at this startling revelation.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE YACHT AND CREW.

It was a long time before Bancroft opened his eyes, and then he did so in a dreary sort of way.

His gaze fell upon Wizard Will, and then upon Foxey, and he tried to raise his hands to his face and started as he saw that his wrists were ironed.

"By Jove! the man is dying!" cried Wizard Will.

"Yes, of fright," Foxey returned, and they sprung to his aid.

But human aid could not save him, for, with a tremor and a groan he breathed his last.

A gloom seemed to fall upon all, in spite of the fact that the man was all that was bad, and a carriage was sent to the nearest village for a coroner.

But, shaking off the feeling upon her, Flora bravely set to work to prepare supper for her guests, and, aided by Foxey, soon had a good meal to set before all.

The coroner arrived in good season, an inquest was held, and the next day the young ferrets, accompanied by Flora, started for town, and the following night were dashing along on a train for New York.

In good time they reached the city, and Flora went to Wizard Will's home, to become the guest of Pearl, while the Boy Detectives set to work to insnare Elegant Ed and his band of Land Sharks.

To do this was no easy task, but Wizard Will and his allies were not to be turned aside by difficulties, and while Foxey was sent to Philadelphia, with half of the League, to hunt down the band in that city, the young captain and the balance of his comrades started upon the trail of Elegant Ed.

The yacht, which Foxey had heard Bancroft tell Flora that Elegant Ed had bought, and was living on, pretending to be a Cuban planter, was found at her anchorage, and Wizard Will sat in the window of a room which overlooked the river, and watched for the outlaw to leave the vessel.

He saw a boat put off from the yacht, and recognized Elegant Ed in his disguise, from the description Foxey had given.

Springing into a hack at the ferry, Elegant Ed drove up-town, little dreaming that two Boy Detectives were upon his track, to shadow him wherever he went through the city.

In the mean time Wizard Will went down to the dock and entered into conversation with the two men who had come ashore with the chief, and who had not yet returned.

"My man, I do love a yacht, and I'd like to ask you some questions about your pretty craft," said Will.

He might have been bluffed off had he not tossed a silver dollar to each man as he spoke.

"What would you like to know, sir?" asked one.

"What is her owner's name?"

"Don Sebastian Fonda, sir."

"A Cuban planter, some one said?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you Cubans?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"How long since the Don came into port?"

"I don't know, sir; but he shipped us two weeks ago."

"Has he much of a crew?"

"A mate, sir, four seamen, a cook, steward and negro valet."

"Are all on board now?"

"The mate went with the cook to market, sir, but the steward and two other seamen are on board, while the negro valet went on shore to the laundry."

"I wish you would take me on board."

"Against orders, sir."

"Here, this will repay you for any scolding you may get, and I would like to see the mate, and you can tell him so."

The money Wizard Will offered as a bribe won the men over, and soon after he was on board the yacht.

It was really a pretty vessel, and fitted up with every luxury, but before Wizard Will had a chance to go over the craft, as he would have liked, one of the seamen said:

"There comes the mate and cook."

Will went into the cabin as the boat ran along—

side, and the mate came there to see who the intruder wanted.

He was an honest-faced sailor, and said, bluntly:

"Well, young man, what do you want on a yacht where you were not invited?"

"Sit down, sir, and I will tell you; but do not lose your temper, for I can convince you that I have a right here, and perhaps can save you trouble."

There was that about the boy that impressed the sailor, and he asked, politely:

"May I ask your name?"

"It matters not, sir, but I wish to ask you some questions, and here is my authority."

As Will spoke he showed his insignia of office.

The mate gave a low whistle, and said:

"Anything wrong about the Don?"

"Yes."

"I half suspected it."

"How long have you known the Don?"

"Two weeks."

"Where did you first meet him?"

"On board the vessel which I built as a toy, and losing money, I concluded to sell, so advertised it."

"The Don came in response, paid me my price, wanted a sailing-master and I volunteered."

"Then he wanted a crew, a cook, a steward and a negro valet, and I got them for him."

"That is all I know, unless it is that he says he is Don Sebastian Fonda, a Cuban planter."

"He is a murderer, a thief, a forger, counterfeiter, burglar and all else that is bad."

"He is not a Cuban planter, but an impostor, and I am here to arrest him as such."

The sailing-master was astounded, but when Will, who had determined to act promptly, showed his proofs of what he said, the honest old sailor cried:

"By Neptune's beard! but I'll attend the hanging of that man with real pleasure."

"When do you expect him back?"

"He was not to board us here, young man, but I was to sail down to Sandy Hook for him, as he said he had to fight a duel there with a gentleman who insulted him, and if he killed him, he would have to sail at once to Cuba."

"And when were you to be there?"

"As soon as I can get there, and we have a good breeze."

"Then let me signal to yonder window, where I have half a dozen young men, and send a boat ashore for them, please, so that we can go with you."

This was done and in half an hour the yacht was bowling along merrily down the harbor, and her destination was an isolated spot on Sandy Hook.

CHAPTER XXV.

BROUGHT TO DOOM.

THE mate had told the truth, when he said that Don Sebastian Fonda was going to Sandy Hook to fight a duel.

The fact is, he had been gambling heavily at the club the night before, and with a stranger in the city, who had been introduced there by some friend.

From some reason the pretended Don tried to force trouble upon the stranger, and he met with such success that he got his face slapped for some insulting remark.

Of course such an insult could be wiped out only by a duel, and the Don had challenged the stranger, who had promptly accepted.

Seconds were selected and a meeting was arranged to take place on Sandy Hook the following afternoon before sunset.

The duelists and their seconds were to take the Long Branch boat, which departed at one o'clock, and arriving at the Hook, they could hire a boat to take them to the scene.

All met promptly upon the boat, and upon their reaching the Hook, two boats were secured to take them to the appointed place of meeting, which one of the seconds knew well.

"Why, there is my yacht coming down the harbor," said the supposed Don, as he saw the pretty craft coming along under full sail, her skipper evidently seeing the party in the boats, and heading toward them.

But a landing was soon made, and the party stepped into a clump of cedars, the seconds measured off ten paces, loaded the pistols, and all was in readiness for the meeting.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," suddenly said the stranger, before the pistols were placed in their hands; "but I wish to let that man know that I am aware of just who he is."

"He thinks that nearly eighteen years have so changed him that I do not remember him; but I do, and I will tell you that once I saved his life,

and introduced him to one who was pledged to be my wife."

"He stole her from me on the eve of the day set for our marriage; the shock killed her old mother; her father died of a broken heart, and I followed the scoundrel to get revenge, and, in a duel he nearly killed me, leaving me for dead."

"Now we meet again, and I intend to kill him, for I have sought him for years for that purpose. Only death can atone for his crimes and the suffering he has entailed."

The words of the stranger, Kent Lomax, created a sensation, and Elegant Ed, for the first time in his life, felt his wonderful nerve fail him.

The seconds gave the order to fire, the weapons flashed together; one man fell, the other was unhurt.

He who fell was Elegant Ed, and, as he did so, Wizard Will and his Boy Ferrets dashed upon the scene.

"Great God! am I too late? Is he dead?" cried Will.

"Yes, I killed him in a duel fought face to face, man to man, though he deserved no mercy at my hands."

"That man deserved the gallows, sir, for he murdered my poor mother— Hal! you are Planter Lomax?" and Will turned to the stranger.

"Yes, and you are the brave Boy Detective I met in Maryland, when you were there to aid Mr. Rossmore in finding the body of his dead boy."

"Yes, sir, I am Will Raymond, the Boy Detective, and I have dogged that man for a long time, that he might end upon the gallows, for, in addition to his other crimes, he took my mother's life, and I vowed to be avenged upon him."

"Boy, do you know who I am?"

All started as the deep voice fell upon their ears.

It was Elegant Ed who spoke, and springing toward him Wizard Will cried:

"He lives! he lives! Save his life, that he yet may hang—hang like a dog!"

"No, boy, I am dying, and so let me tell you who I am."

"That man knows me as Schuyler Cluett, who stole his lady-love; you know me as Elegant Ed, the Chief of the Land Sharks."

"I am both; but the woman I married was Ruby Raymond. She took her maiden name, and, boy, you have been saved by Kent Lomax, from leading your own father to the gallows!"

All started as these fearful words fell from the lips of the dying man, while Wizard Will cried:

"No, no, my father is dead, long ago! You lie, even under the shadow of death!"

"My son, is your mother Ruby Raymond?" asked Kent Lomax.

"Yes, sir, such was her name."

"That man tells the truth; I see it now, for you are the image of your mother, and, thank God, I saved you from sending your own father, vile murderer that he is, to the gallows!"

"Thank God that it is so," cried Will fervently, and he gazed with a look of horror at his father, as he told the story of his life, up to the death-blow he had given his wife.

With the last words, unrepentant, sneering, he died, and thus had Elegant Ed cheated the gallows, though shadowed to his doom by one he had most bitterly wronged.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONCLUSION.

ELEGANT ED was buried where he fell, and all present seemed most anxious to keep the secret on account of the part they had played in the tragic scene.

All sailed back to the city in the chief's yacht, which Wizard Will turned over to Captain Daly as a prize, while he told the story of the Land Shark's death as it had occurred.

Just as he had finished the strange story, Foxey came into quarters, with half a dozen of the Land Sharks as prisoners, which he had captured in Philadelphia, and it was hoped that the Book of Doom, which Wizard Will had found in Elegant Ed's room, would hang them, but the book with the life-histories of the Land Sharks had mysteriously disappeared from the cottage, and it was believed the chief had seen and taken it the night of his visit there.

The Land Sharks, however, were put upon trial, and got ten years apiece in prison for their crimes.

Foxey also made a most wonderful discovery while in Philadelphia, and this was that he not only found who Flora was, and discovered the

executors of her father's will, but he found that he was her own true brother.

In the pleasant home of Wizard Will, he told of his escaping massacre by the Indians, and being taken captive; then how a gentleman adopted him and sent him to school. His benefactor died, leaving nothing, and Foxey had drifted to sea. All the time he was trying to find his sister and his former home.

He told a straight story, the song his mother taught him, he and Flora alone could sing, and the resemblance between them was striking.

So Foxey, or Foxwell Dale, as his real name was, and his lovely sister, went to their old home and came in possession of their vast inheritance.

As for Wizard Will, he, too, gave up the life of a detective, after that last awful experience. He and Pearl returned to Maryland with Kent Lomax, who adopted them as his children, and they were very happy in making the latter years of his life years of great peace, after all the sorrows he had known in the past through the machinations of that Prince of Evil, Elegant Ed.

THE END.

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